

# Condé Nast Traveler

MARCH 2021

*Rome's  
Eternal Appeal*

*Stargazing in  
the Southwest*

*Bangkok's  
Cutting-Edge  
Creatives*

+ 32 WAYS  
TO CELEBRATE  
THIS YEAR

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SHINE BRIGHTEST**

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PHOTOGRAPH: JENNY ZARINS



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*Among the fjords of Norway's rugged west coast, a devoutly sustainable approach to hospitality has taken root; surveying northern Italy's Slow Food movement and its disciples, who hold the past and future in equally high esteem; and a seaside-skimming escape route along New Brunswick's Acadian coastline*

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## REASONS TO CELEBRATE

*After a year when milestone trips were mostly impossible, we tally the big ones we'll soon be taking again—honeymoons, birthdays, family reunions, and more—while exploring how all travel can be an act of celebration*

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## A TRAVELER'S TALE

*In Iceland, actor Stanley Tucci finds that wonderment comes easily*

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PHOTOGRAPH: THE INGALLS

# The Editor's Letter

**This issue contains** tales about looking up, and out, and beyond what's in front of our faces. Of course it makes perfect sense right now to ponder the universe and our tiny temporal position within it. Because when you consider infinite time and space, then this moment is nothing—a dot, an aberration—so hold tight and the good days will come again. And yet, now that I think of all my most significant worldly wonderings, those experiences when I could have felt most connected with the grander scheme of things, they have all been entirely the opposite—rooted in the absolute pedestrian, the foibles and minutiae of being a small and messy human.

For example, the cover story takes place under the dark skies of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. When I took my own trip here, even as I was observing the most astonishing fork lightning display wreaking beautiful havoc over Monument Valley, I was also having a blazing row with my husband, and our shouting had made one, if not two, if not all three of the children cry. But the more I have reflected on it, and the more I have mulled over the travel stories that I have thrived on and cultivated and cleaved to as part of the song lines of my life, practically every one involves an argument, a left turn, a mistake, a screwup, a misunderstanding, a confrontation, and possibly something that skirted near-death.

And it turns out, this has been what I've really missed, the living out by pushing to the edge, the actual physical scrabbling around in other places, other spaces, and being late, and fraught, everyone having forgotten something, and most definitely being entirely, viscerally, bloodcurdlingly furious. Having a glorious inane fight with any single family member you can think of! Because they're being impossible! But then suddenly looking up and out, and beyond, and there are hippos, or mountains, or savanna, or snow, or night skies, and everything is made more poignant and brilliant by the other.

This is the new issue of *Condé Nast Traveler*. For those ready to be hauled over the hot coals of new adventures.



**MELINDA STEVENS**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

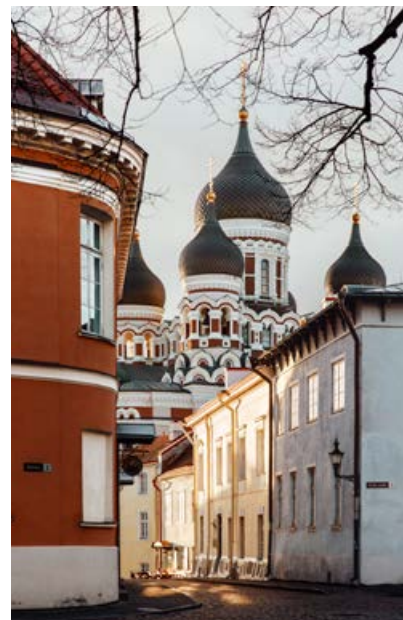


MelindaLP



## On the Cover

The magnificent night sky above the eco-retreat Shash Diné, outside Page, Arizona. Photographed by Julien Capmeil



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Daybreak at the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn, Estonia. Photographed by Bronwyn Townsend (@bonnejournal)

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# word of mouth

The people, places, and ideas we're talking about right now



## Let's Celebrate Again Soon

We've all had to stay home for special occasions we wanted to travel for. But that doesn't mean we can't plan now to mark those milestones later—when the time is right

A view of the Nile from the Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Aswan

word of mouth → in the air

**When my father turned 60**, I sent him a letter with this proposition: You choose the destination, I'll fund the trip. What would he pick, I wondered. Croatia? Japan? Madagascar?

Instead, it was Egypt, a country he has loved since he was nine and my grandmother took him and my aunt there to live for five months while she reported on agricultural conditions in the region. When we were visiting the Temple of Philae, on an island near Aswan, my dad recalled a memorable encounter on the Nile; a local farmer rowed up and proposed to my grandmother that his daughter marry my father. More memories bubbled up as we wandered endlessly past the stalls of Khan el-Khalili bazaar in Cairo, caravanned before dawn to Abu Simbel, took a private taxi to the Valley of the Queens after missing the tourist bus. We planned the trip to coincide with his 61st birthday, which we spent traveling downriver on a felucca boat, going into a village in the late afternoon to buy camel meat, which we roasted on the banks of the Nile. The captain was a playful young Egyptian named Ayob, who fell in love with a Kiwi passenger in the midst of an epic world tour and convinced her to come back with him to meet his parents—just another crazy detail from one of the great trips of both of our lives.

When you travel to mark an occasion, you create unusually powerful memories. Here are two of my own birthdays that stand out: When I turned 29, I was in Barcelona for work, but I didn't have anything to do all day, so I spent hours in the museum Fundació Joan Miró and explored the attractions of Montjuïc Hill. When I took the gondola back down to the city, there was a complete rainbow splayed across the skyline, which I could only regard as a birthday gift from a higher power. Then, when I turned 40, my wife booked a week at one of the oceanfront cottages at Sea Ranch, in Sonoma County. She and the kids and I spent our days going for walks and watching the ocean for gray whales, cooking delicious meals, entertaining my youngest brother and my dad and his wife and their cat. They were some of the most tranquil and restorative days I can remember as an adult. (I returned the favor



The author with his family at Sea Ranch, in Sonoma County

when she turned 40 by taking the family to GoldenEye, in Jamaica.)

You know where I'm going with this. For nearly a year now, we have been mostly unable to take the kinds of milestone trips we'll treasure forever. As I write these words, I am just a few days away from my 43rd birthday, during which I will most likely not leave my neighborhood. But that's okay: I'm already dreaming about the next one. Not long before the pandemic, I joined some old friends in Peru for another 40th; I'd love to gather the same group for a cycling adventure somewhere beautiful with great food and wine—maybe Alentejo. And I want all of you to start making those kinds of plans too, which is why we've put together a wonderful package of inspiration and ideas (page 43) for celebratory trips to take in our fast-arriving post-pandemic future. So get booking!

Of course, if there's anything this last year has taught us, it's that you can mark a milestone whenever you feel like it, and you don't even need one for travel to be a celebration. I felt this acutely every time my family went anywhere in 2020—especially on our second visit to the Finger Lakes, to stay at the just-opened Lake House on Canandaigua. Now, in the depths of winter, I find myself treasuring little moments from that trip, like when my daughter started chatting up a family of locals while roasting s'mores over the firepit, or when the kids discovered their passion for ropes courses at nearby Bristol Mountain, or when I was alone in a kayak in the middle of the lake gazing back at the dollhouse-size hotel in the distance. In those moments, I remember thinking, Holy cow, I'm on vacation! And even with the masks and the social distancing and the general unease that hung over everything in 2020, it was sublime. I want more of that feeling in the months ahead, for myself and for all of you. **JESSE ASHLOCK, EDITOR, U.S.**

word of mouth → walk this block



Meir Park  
in the  
afternoon

## Hidden in Plain Sight

Tucked into the busy heart of Tel Aviv, this stretch of King George is one of the city's best-kept secrets

**Packed into a mere 20 square miles**, Tel Aviv often feels too small for surprises. But locals, especially those navigating the tourist crush around Dizengoff Street, know a good one: You can evade the mayhem just by cutting a block over to King George Street. The broad, leafy boulevard snakes all the way to the busy stalls of Carmel Market—but stick between Meir Park, with its towering palm trees and LGBTQ+ center, and the cartoonish sculptures of Masaryk Square, for this strip's best offerings: vendors selling expertly fried falafel, of course, but also clubs showcasing the city's lively music scene, fine jewelry shops using age-old techniques, and more. **DEBRA KAMIN**



Falafel  
HaKosem  
is a cult  
favorite

### The Music Venue

Every Israeli musician worth their salt got started on the stage of Ozen Bar. This intimate indie dive, perhaps the city's most legendary performance space, has shows upstairs most nights. (You do need tickets to get in, though you can often nab them at the door.) Downstairs, browse row upon row of vintage vinyl. *Tickets from \$10; ozenbar.com*

### The Vegan Café

Tel Aviv has more vegans per capita than any other city on earth. Hole-in-the-wall spot Goodness accommodates those who abstain from meat and dairy with healthy twists on diner classics: burgers made from a savory blend of portobello and garlic confit and sandwiches packed with shredded jackfruit or seitan shawarma. Crepes laced with roasted cauliflower and a buttery cashew cream taste deceptively sinful. *Lunch for two from \$15; goodness.co.il*

### The Shoemaker

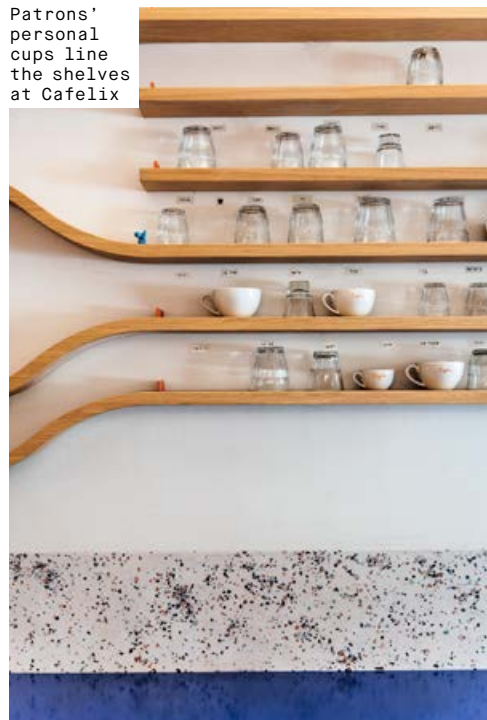
Israeli designer Maya Levi's airy shop stocks strappy sandals, mules, and low-heel booties, all made by hand at her

studio in Rishon LeZion. Crafted from supple Italian leather, they're comfortable enough to see you through long days of city sightseeing. *olive-thomas.co.il*

### The Street Food Staple

Even with a branch of Eyal Shani's famed street-food restaurant Miznon down the street, the patio benches of Falafel HaKosem are always packed, and for good reason. The falafel is crispy, the hummus is silky smooth, and the shawarma comes off the spit impeccably spiced. It all goes into pita pockets as soft as pillows.

Patrons' personal cups line the shelves at Cafelix



Ask for amba (pickled mango sauce) for an extra-tart punch. *Lunch for two from about \$30; falafelhakosem.com*

### The Jewelry Designer

When Yonatan Ashur was a boy, he learned the secret to molding yellow gold and setting precious gemstones from his grandfather, who worked as a jeweler in Morocco. Now he uses those same methods to create his own artful pieces, like hammered gold necklaces, delicate drop earrings, and rings set with juicy cabochon rubies and emeralds. *yonatanashur.com*

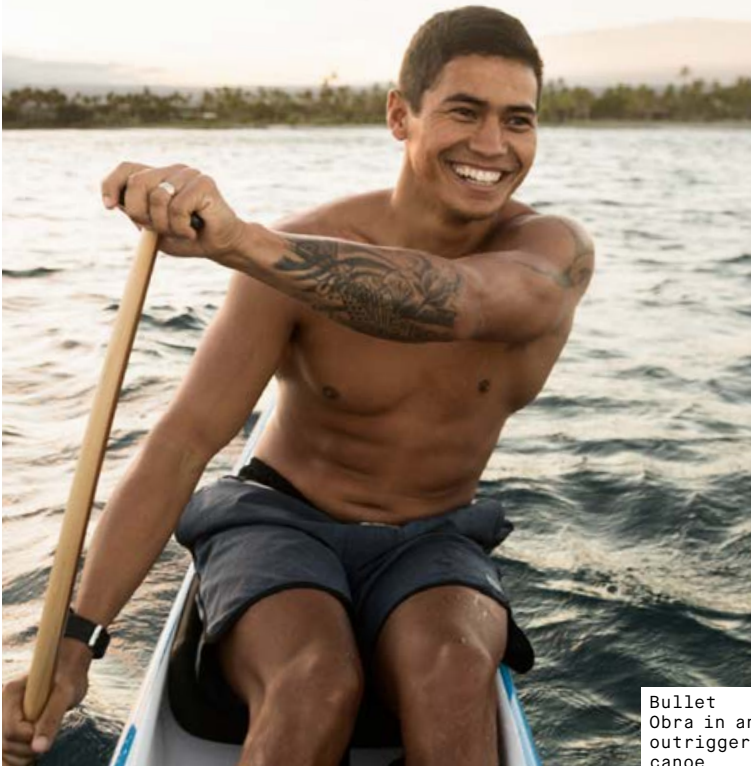
### The Coffee Shop

Cafelix, a much-loved Tel Aviv small-batch coffee roaster, has three locations around the city, but this quiet outpost, on the ground floor of a Bauhaus building just off King George, is the most laid-back of the bunch. Sip a café hafuch, or “upside-down” coffee, the delicious Israeli twist on a cappuccino, while watching locals file in for their morning fix. *cafelix.co.il*



## Chairman of the Board

How one wave guru on Hawaii's Big Island plots his days around the surf report



Bullet Obra in an outrigger canoe

**Bullet Obra**, head of *Kainalu Pros*, leads water-sport activities at *Mauna Lani, Auberge Resorts Collection*, on the island of Hawaii

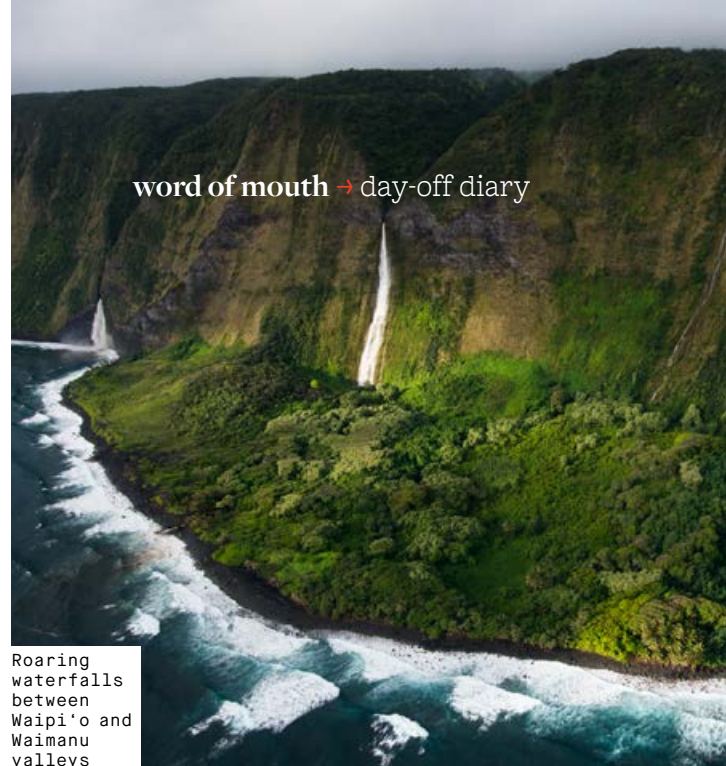
Think of the Big Island—the largest and most sparsely populated in the Hawaiian archipelago—as the ultimate adventure playground. With its endless surf breaks, jagged peaks, and valley floors carpeted in jungle, the outside Eden inspires locals and visitors to spend as many hours as they can in the great outdoors. “I see our geographic diversity every day when I drive to work, and I can’t help but feel happy,” says Bullet Obra, a Big Island native who oversees Mauna Lani’s roster of aquatic activities, including snorkeling and diving trips. Here are the secret surf spots and great coffee bars he frequents—that is, when he’s not teaching guests how to stand-up paddleboard in the unspoiled waters off the Kohala Coast.

### Breaking Dawn

“The best time to surf is early in the morning, when the water is still glassy. I’ll get up before the sun rises—no breakfast, maybe a quick coffee—and head to a favorite spot like Beach 69 or Anaehoomalu Bay where the wave quality is high. I’ve been surfing these spots since I was three and have a lifelong connection to them.”

### Lunch Ritual

“Skipping breakfast is intentional—otherwise I would never stop to rest. About three hours in, I’ll head for poke at La’au’s, a spot near Kawaihae



Roaring waterfalls between Waipi’o and Waimanu valleys

Harbor. They use locally caught fish and secret ingredients—which I can’t share here, of course. But they make the best poke on the island, hands down. I’ll get it to go and drive down to Waialea Bay to eat it.”

### Caffeine Fix

“Pretty much everything I choose to do all day is in the water, but if I get rained out, my wife, Stevee, and I love to spend time at the Waimea Coffee Company. Friends stop in, and the owner, Max, is always there. It’s small and has a great vibe. My go-to is a cortado or a quad dirty chai with coconut milk.”

### Natural Wonder

“One of the most special places on the island—if not the state—is Waipi’o Valley and the six others that surround it. Known as the Valley of the Kings, it is sacred for us Hawaiians: King Kamehameha the Great was raised there. It’s

quiet and peaceful, and it has waterfalls and beaches that are great for taking long walks. You need a four-wheel drive to get there and should go with someone who knows it. But if you visit, please respect the land and what it has to offer.”

### Dinner and a Show

“I live in the mountains in Waialea, and Stevee and I go to Kohala Mountain on the north side. There’s a vantage point that is breathtaking at sunset; you can hike up to it, though we drive. If we do dinner afterward, it’ll be at Aka Sushi Bar in Waimea. Order the Aka roll with shrimp tempura and spicy ahi on top and the crispy salmon-skin salad. There’s only one nightclub in Waimea, but luckily it has exceptional live music. It’s called Big Island Brewhaus. I’m not much of a drinker, but I hear it serves tasty craft beer, and the music alone is worth stopping in for.”

AS TOLD TO ERIN FLORIO

**The 1 in 10 Project** Our newly launched editorial initiative celebrates the more than 10 percent of people around the globe whose jobs are tied to tourism in some way. With the pandemic still ongoing, we’re spotlighting these individuals with different series that give a glimpse into their everyday lives.

word of mouth → on the map

## Staying Power

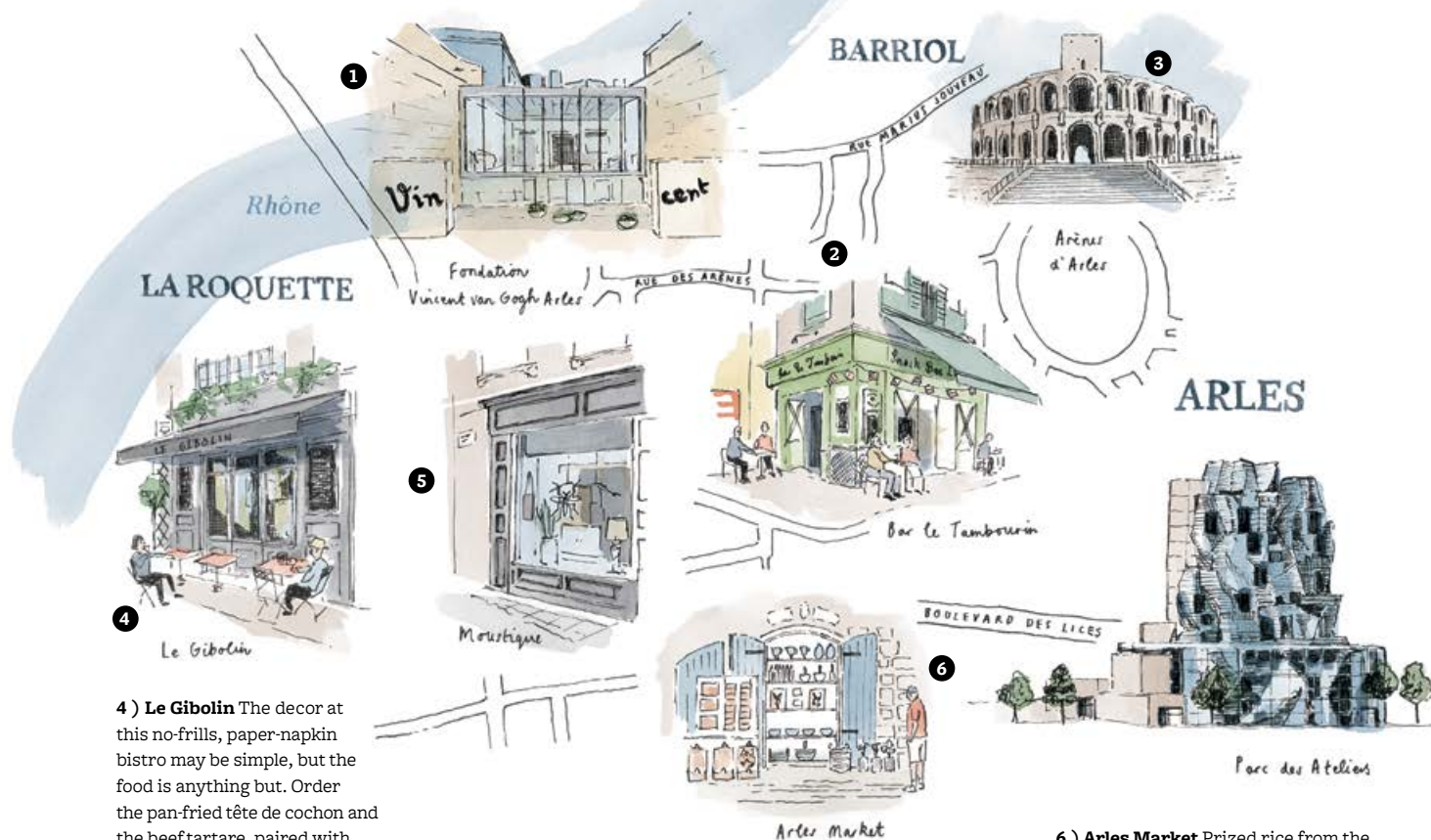
A long-awaited cultural hub promises to cement Arles's place on the global art circuit—but there's plenty more to see in this ancient French town

The Provençal city of Arles isn't new on the arts scene. Van Gogh created some of his most famed works here, while the envelope-pushing Rencontres d'Arles, the annual photography festival, has drawn visitors to the town's cobbled streets since 1970. Now, with this summer's opening of the Parc des Ateliers at Luma Arles, a sprawling complex on the grounds of an old rail yard, Arles could join Bilbao and Dundee among the ranks of formerly obscure cities turned pilgrimage sites for art lovers. Commissioned in 2008 by philanthropist Maja Hoffmann's Luma Foundation, the center includes a showstopping aluminum-panel-clad tower by architect Frank Gehry that will house works by the likes of Annie Leibovitz and Pipilotti Rist. And it's not Arles's only draw; here's what else to see. LINDSEY TRAMUTA

**1) Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles**  
Though the museum lacks a permanent collection—it rotates in pieces from Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum—it's worth a visit for exhibitions that juxtapose the Dutch master's canvases with work by modern greats like David Hockney and painter Laura Owens. [fondation-vincentvangogh-arles.org](http://fondation-vincentvangogh-arles.org)

**2) Bar Le Tambourin** For a morning latte—or an afternoon pastis, if that's more your speed—head to this Arlesian institution run by former bullfighters. (Arles imported the Spanish sport back in the 18th century.) Old photographs of the city's celebrity matadors hang everywhere—even in the bathroom.

**3) Arènes d'Arles** Crowds come to see Provençal-style bullfighting, known as *course camargaise*, at this first-century Roman amphitheater during the Feria d'Arles, which kicks off each spring; the well-preserved site also hosts theatrical performances and jazz-pop concerts. Take to its ancient passageways and subterranean caverns when the mistral inevitably blows through. [arlestourisme.com](http://arlestourisme.com)



**4) Le Gibolin** The decor at this no-frills, paper-napkin bistro may be simple, but the food is anything but. Order the pan-fried tête de cochon and the beef tartare, paired with a Régnié wine from Guy Breton. Before opening Le Gibolin, seasoned owners Brigitte Cazalas and Luc Desrousseaux spent 30 years running a cave à manger in Paris. *Fixed menu from \$42 per person*

**5) Moustique** Art and bullfighting aren't the city's only enduring symbols; mosquitoes, common to the region, are part of its lore too. This concept shop embraces the buzz by selling home wares etched with the insect, plus accessories and fashion infused with elegant Provençal flair. Pick up a stack of ceramic dishware featuring hand-painted illustrations by artist Roxane Lagache. [moustiquearles.com](http://moustiquearles.com)

**6) Arles Market** Prized rice from the Camargue wetlands, freshly caught seafood, fragrant bundles of tarragon: You'll find it all at this lively regional market, which stretches over a mile and a half in the city center. To beat the crowds, hit the coffee cart by 8 a.m. for an espresso with the locals.



Kingi, an 1880s warehouse turned restaurant

Looking out at Viaduct Harbour



→ urban study

## On the Waterfront

Auckland's reinvigorated harbors and converted industrial spaces are helping turn the oft-bypassed Kiwi city into a destination

Despite Auckland's twin harbors fronting the Pacific Ocean and Tasman Sea, and rolling plains studded with volcanic peaks, many international travelers treat the city as a transit stop en route to New Zealand's renowned lodges or the ski resorts of Queenstown. But the so-called City of Sails is having a moment, and not just because the America's Cup will be contested there next month. Major urban renewal projects have revived neglected sectors of the Auckland waterfront,

with 19th-century industrial areas being recast into a striking mix of heritage and contemporary architecture, green spaces, and alleyways crowded with new addresses for travelers' to-do lists.

The biggest news is Britomart, nine blocks of warehouses reborn as a 21st-century hub anchored by central Takutai Square, home to the brick-clad Hotel Britomart, which opened last fall. Its calling card is five spacious rooftop guest rooms dubbed Landing Suites—each luminous and textured, three with garden terraces. Elsewhere in the hotel's ecosystem are retailers, big global names like Chanel and hometown favorites like designer Karen Walker, as well as dozens of bars and restaurants, such as the seafood-focused Kingi, a relaxed spot with a Pacific Rim bent.

The just-opened Park Hyatt Auckland is duking it out with the Hotel Britomart for the international jetset. It looms like a glass palace beside Waitematā Harbour in Wynyard Quarter, the docklands precinct recently converted into the America's Cup home base. The 195 guest rooms are among the most generous in town, with slick interiors by Conran and Partners London punctuated by traditional Maori art. The new QT Auckland at nearby Viaduct Harbour is less conventional, with cheeky, multihued guest rooms and a vibrant art collection throughout. The biggest draw of this 150-room hotel, the latest from the eclectic Australian hospitality group QT Hotels & Resorts, is a sixth-floor rooftop bar with endless marina and harbor views.

Excellent restaurants—like Hello Beastly, a Pop art–decorated, Asian-inflected place serving things like KFC (Korean fried cauliflower) and wild king prawns sautéed in garlic and kombu butter—are within walking distance of all three hotels. So is La Cigale French Market, where farmers, bakers, and makers set up stalls every weekend selling the likes of organic gooseberries from the Bay of Plenty and ham-and-aioi sandwiches on fresh baguettes.

When New Zealand's borders reopen, travelers will find more to do than ever outside the city: new and updated lodges like The Lindis and Kauri Cliffs, as well as fresh walking and cycling itineraries. But they'll also find themselves with ample reasons to stick around Auckland for more than just a night. **KENDALL HILL**

word of mouth → checking in



Catching air on Mount Niseko Annapuri



A local food truck serving takoyaki

## Powder Plus

New hotels and off-piste options land at Japan's favorite ski resort

**For the past two decades**, Niseko Village, a ski resort on Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido, has been dominated by powder pilgrims happy to forgo off-slope luxuries for adrenaline-spiking runs and endless backcountry options. However, a whirl of activity, including the opening of the Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono in December and the launch of Eleven Experience itineraries in 2019, suggests that change is in the air. Especially promising for broadening the resort's appeal with international travelers is the new Higashiyama Niseko Village, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, which began welcoming guests late last year. Located at the foot of Mount Niseko Annapuri, with views of Mount Yotei, the hotel has made getting to the slopes easier by letting guests rent gear, book lessons, and buy lift passes in the lobby as well as giving them priority access to the high-speed gondola that leads to 70 runs and 2,191 acres of skiable terrain. But the property also encourages clicking out of your bindings and seeing more of the region, with excursions to tour local dairy farms and visits to Indigenous Ainu villages where a mostly forgotten Japan lives on. *Doubles from \$800; ritzcarlton.com* ADAM H. GRAHAM

### WHERE TO SKI NEXT

Europe's best slopes get fresh lodges

#### Whitepod Eco Luxury Hotel, Switzerland

When they debuted in 2004, Whitepod's geodesic tents, perched high in the Swiss Alps, paved the way for eco ski lodging. But tight quarters and extreme slopes limited their appeal to a certain type of adventurer. The property's new larchwood chalets overlooking the Villars-Les Diablerets ski area are ideal for the rest of us (namely families and those with intermediate downhill chops) who want the same sustainability with more comforts, like breakfast delivered by an electric Land Rover and three-bedroom standalones powered entirely by the nearby stream. *Doubles from \$715; whitepod.com*

#### Forestis, Italy

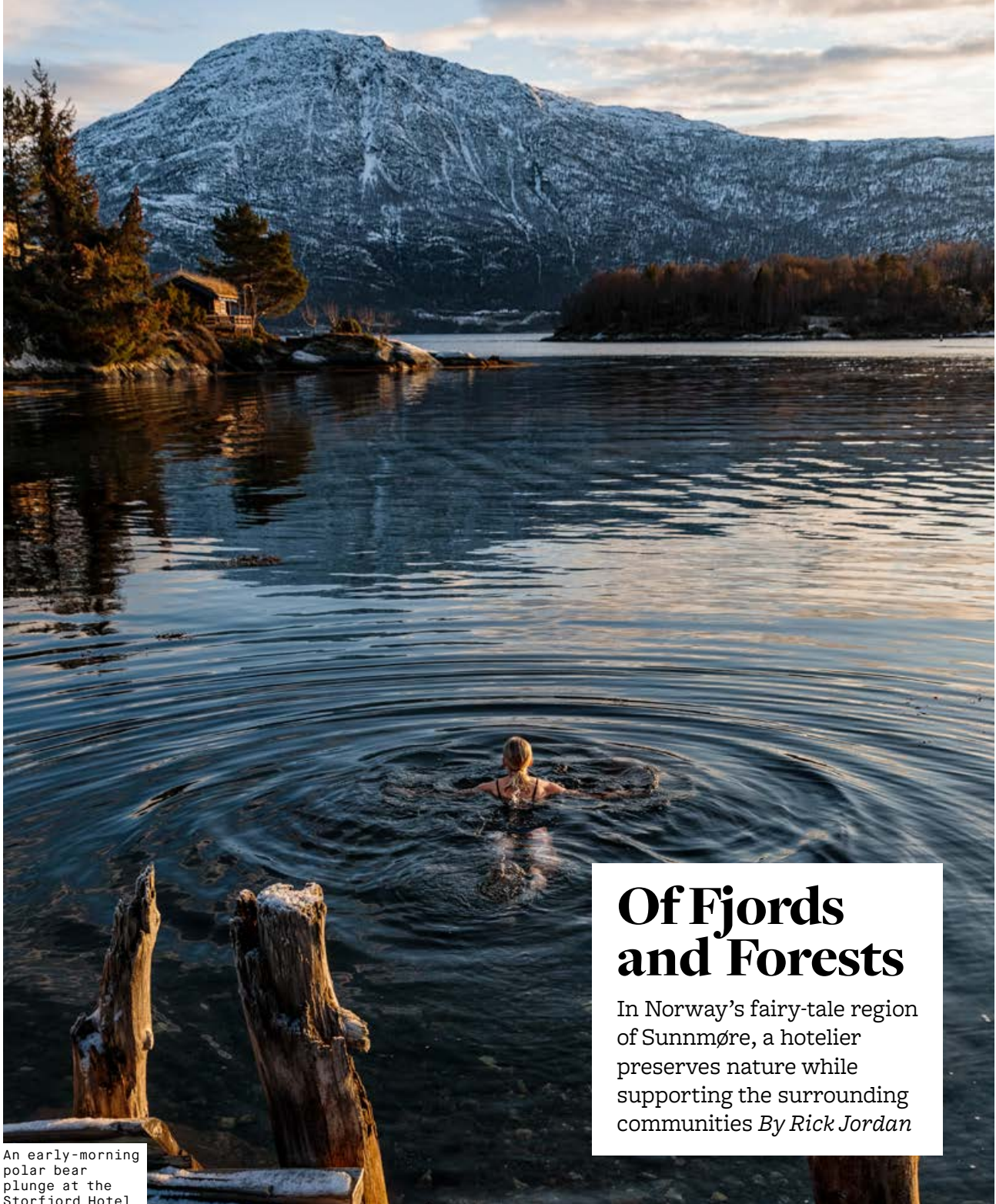
Wellness has drawn travelers to Italy's German-speaking Südtirol region since locals began luring Romans to the thermal baths two millennia ago. Last summer a building originally designed as a sanatorium for Austrian royalty was reborn as a year-round resort. Now 62 spruce-lined suites near the Palmschoss chairlift on Mount Plose overlook miles of trails through the honey-hued Dolomites. At the property's heart is a 21,528-square-foot spa with saunas and treatments like the healing Tree Circle facial. Guests can also try Wyda, an ancient yoga-like Celt practice. *Doubles from \$300; forestis.it*

#### Aurora Lodge, Norway

Days are short this far north of the Arctic Circle, which just means that excursions at this private 12-person chalet designed by architect Snorre Stinessen continue long after the sun goes down. These include night dives with orca whales or free riding the Lyngen Peninsula's ungroomed mountains right down to the shores of the Arctic Ocean, followed by a warm-up in the outdoor soaking tub under the glow of the northern lights. The lodge is accessible by boat or helicopter and bookable through tour operator Black Tomato. *Five days inclusive of meals, excursions, and transfers runs \$129,610; blacktomato.com*

# why we travel

The experiences that change how we see the world



## Of Fjords and Forests

In Norway's fairy-tale region of Sunnmøre, a hotelier preserves nature while supporting the surrounding communities *By Rick Jordan*

An early-morning polar bear plunge at the Stor fjord Hotel

PHOTOGRAPH: THE INGALLS



The main entrance to the Storffjord Hotel

**On a small island** off the crinkle-cut northwest coast of Norway, with no land between it and Iceland, there lives an artist whose brooding, semi-abstract oil paintings draw inspiration from the surrounding soil and sky—sometimes literally. His name is Ørnulf Opdahl, the isle is called Godøy, and sometimes he walks the few yards to the beach and scoops up a handful of sand to give his paint texture. Opdahl's home is Norway's landscape in miniature. There is a lake and a mountain and a red-striped lighthouse that seems to act as a conduit for the northern lights. All around is ocean.

It would be almost madness for an artist not to be influenced by the elements here. Godøy is part of Sunnmøre, an archipelago along the western coast of the country and one of the world's great, insurmountably raw regions: etched by glaciers, shaded by intense greenery. These islands ripple out into the Norwegian Sea, some threaded together by tunnels burrowed beneath the water, though there are far more routes for boats than for cars. The dark Sunnmøre Alps, which possess a sublime, magnetic beauty, have drawn climbers since the 19th century. There are many places of solitude, with names that could have blown in with the wind. Storhornet. Aksla. Skårasalen. Life has long been measured by the rhythm of the seasons, tangled with sheep's wool and scattered with fish scales. The area's one and only city, Ålesund, is really an overgrown fishing village, albeit one crafted in a rainbow of sherbet-hued Art Nouveau, the stone chiseled into turrets and spires, a pocket of watercolor politeness in the face of so much wilderness.

"It's quite different to anywhere else in Norway, which can often be so much



Looking out at the Sunnmøre Alps from a cozy corner of the hotel

more of the same," says Vebjørn Andresen, who was born farther north, in Tromsø, and arrived here from the wide-open polar expanses of Svalbard. "But the landscape is so compact here. Scenery can change by the minute. The first time I drove through the valley of Norangsdalen, I was so startled by the view I had to pull over and sit on the grass." Last summer he took a boat out by himself and spent the weekends sculling through the fjord, often the only figure in the landscape, dwarfed by the peaks and wondering how the tiny red-roofed farms clinging to the sides had ever been built. Rowing along these



shores in a small vessel, the rock faces plunging at almost sheer angles, can feel like Jonah entering the belly of the whale.

Andresen's reason for coming to this part of Norway was to take on the role of CEO at 62° Nord, an experiential hotel and travel group founded by locally born Knut Flakk and his family. The story of the venture spools back to Norway's oldest knitted-garment manufacturer, Devold, which Flakk's father bought in the 1980s. Devold is something of a household name, founded in 1853 by a forward-looking entrepreneur who installed electric lights in his

factory just four years after their invention. Workers wove wool from nearby farms into warm long johns and thermals. When the Victorian explorer Fridtjof Nansen traversed Greenland on cross-country skis, he was wearing Devold undergarments; so was Roald Amundsen when he reached the North Pole. And the russet-bearded actor Kristofer Hivju—better known as *Game of Thrones*' Tormund Giantsbane, and a regular visitor to Ålesund—insisted the whole cast wear them on set in below-freezing Iceland. So when Flakk was forced to move his manufacturing to Lithuania in 2003 to survive in the global market, he faced a challenge: how to make sure the region wasn't diminished as a result. After all, by building his business here, the original founder had helped save local communities at a time when many were buying one-way tickets to the U.S. He decided to see the moment as an opportunity. "I was looking at a way of creating jobs and realized that there was no high-end →



Local quail and chicken eggs



Fireside dining at the hotel

travel experience here,” Flakk says. “It was peculiar, considering the country’s wealth. And there’s so much natural beauty around Ålesund.”

The 62° Nord group, which Flakk conceived with his wife, Line, takes a considered, sustainable approach that is intertwined with the life of the region. The two opened the first of their three hotels, Hotel Brosundet, in the center of Ålesund—so close to the water that guests have been known to leap from their windows into the waves. The former fishing warehouse was reimaged by Snøhetta, the architectural outfit that designed the Oslo Opera House and the National September 11 Memorial Museum and Pavilion in New York. Room 47 of the Brosundet is located in a small lighthouse at the end of a quay a short walk from the main hotel. The 62° Nord group also took over the imposing, chalet-style Hotel Union Øye, an hour’s boat ride away at the end of a fjord, and renovated the Storfjord Hotel, named for the glacial waters below, after purchasing it from an Anglo-Norwegian couple. Another of the group’s

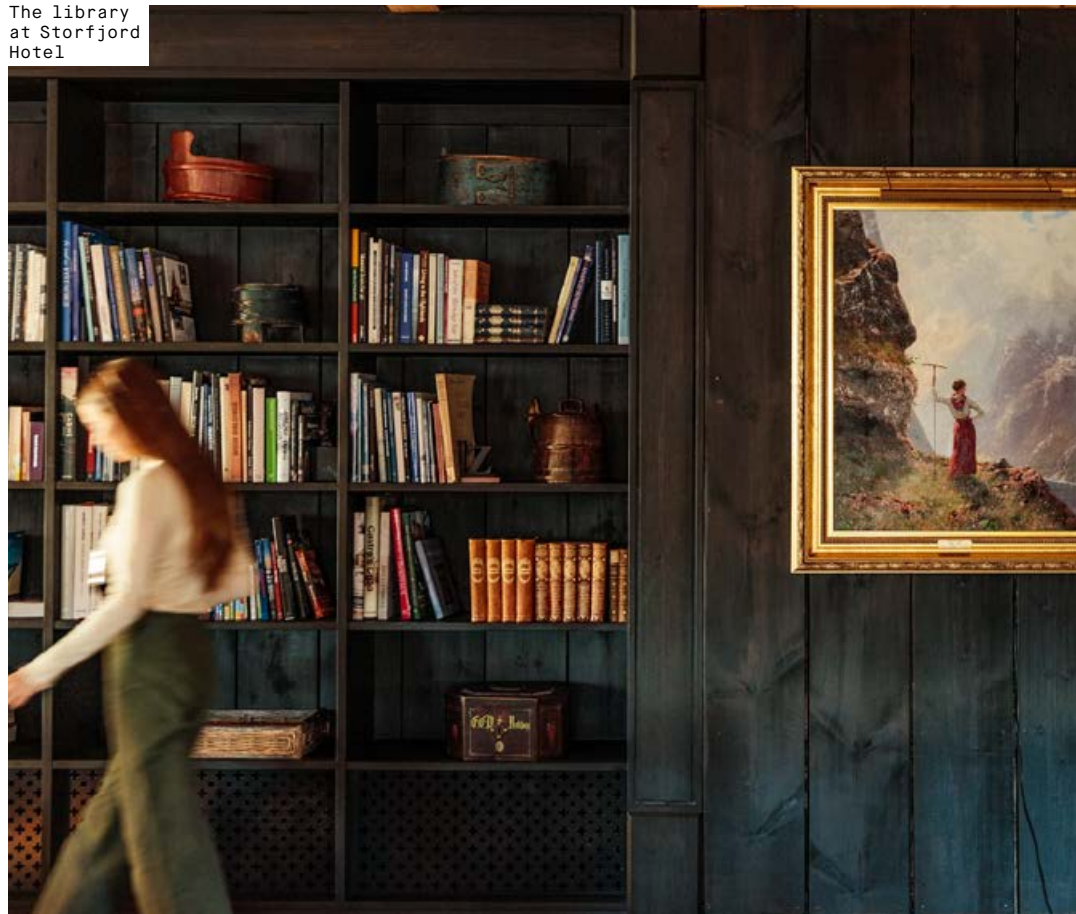
properties, the three-bedroom Owner’s Cabin, is a secluded weather-watching outpost on Giske, an islet occupied only by wading birds, seals, and the occasional Scandi band riffing at the small recording studio. And the original Devold factory remains a place where things are made. The family invited artists and artisans to occupy the space—a blacksmith who uses a 1920s forge, a ceramist, a glassblower, and an illustrator—forming a communal creative hub for the area.

Flakk’s approach is inspired by the idea of geotourism, which aims to preserve the integrity of a destination by actively involving the community while protecting natural habitats. Rather than just parachuting in and out of a place, travelers are able to really get under its skin. With 62° Nord, that could mean a food safari to an organic farm and picking berries, herbs, and mushrooms with its owners; kayaking into fjords past waterfalls and glaciers; or swishing off in an inflatable boat to Runde, where puffins arrive on the same day every year, flying in such numbers that the air seems a maelstrom of feathers and orange webbed feet. “It’s been a slow process, but we decided back in 2005 there wasn’t any conflict between profit, society, and the environment,” Flakk says.

The subject of Norway and sustainability is a contradictory one. Nearly half of the new cars in the nation are electric, and Oslo has closed off much of the city to vehicles so residents cycle, walk, or take the tram instead of driving. The elephant in the room, of course, is the country’s status as a leading oil nation. The huge reserves discovered in the late 1960s transformed the largely rural economy. While



The library  
at Storfjord  
Hotel



Owner's Cabin,  
which can be  
booked, on the  
islet of Giske



Norway's power network runs almost entirely on clean hydroelectricity, the country also exports gas and oil and seeks out fresh deposits, although its mammoth \$992 billion sovereign wealth fund now focuses on seeding ethical investments such as the Green Climate Fund, which helps developing countries. "We were really lucky in being able to create that wealth," says Flakk, "but it's only natural that we take the front seat in developing sustainable energy. As for exporting oil—well, it affects the planet no matter who uses it."

Flakk is also investing his resources in ways that contribute to the country's green shift. His efforts have centered on creating a business collective to produce hydrogen. "Many people are focused on reducing their footprint and the use of plastics, and being energy-efficient, but I'm more interested in being climate-positive, with renewable sources. Hydrogen is a zero-emission energy carrier that can be used for boats, trains, and planes." His current goal is making sure the ferries that crisscross the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Geirangerfjord are supplied with hydrogen fuel cells by 2023, and also providing hydrogen refueling points for next-generation buses, trucks, and trains.

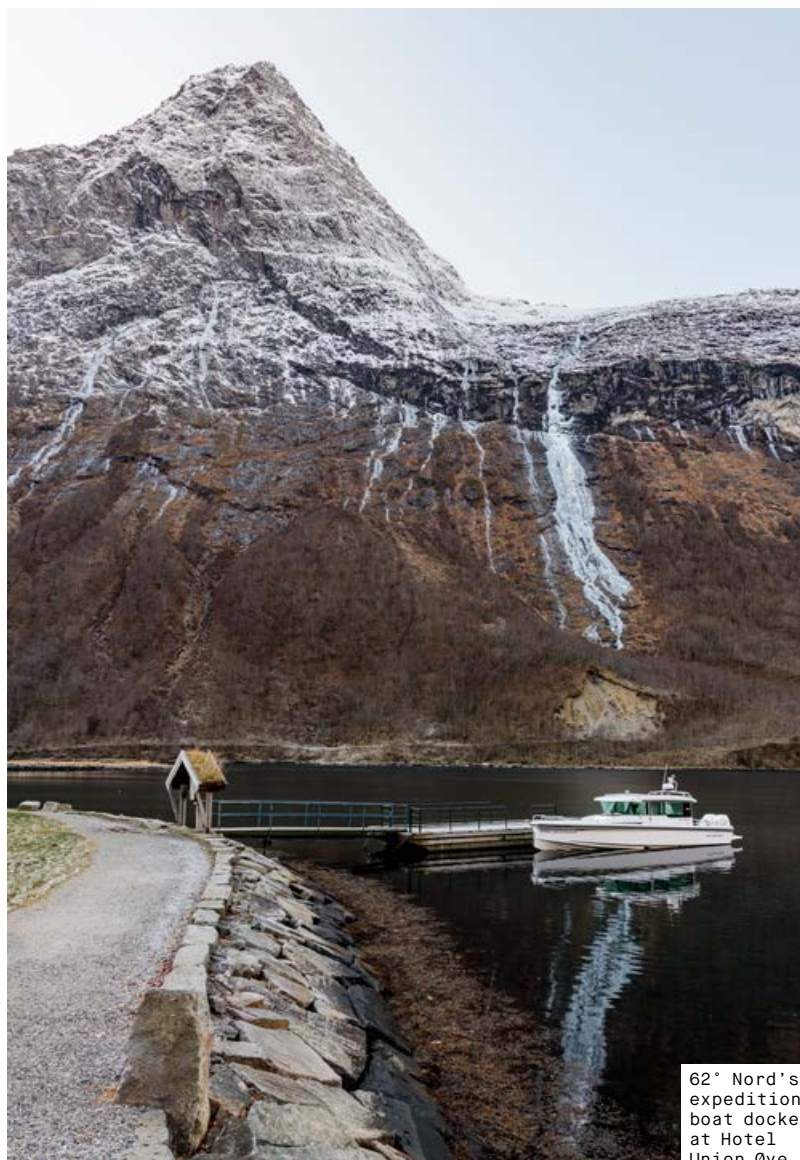
People in the region have started to see the advantages of geotourism, Flakk says. A handful have opened up their farms for small numbers of guests. The village of Norangsfjord was in danger of becoming unsustainable—no real industry or transportation links—until 62° Nord took over Union Øye, improving access and securing jobs. Characters in the hotel group include Tom Tøsse, from Ålesund,

who captains a small fleet and tells the best fireside stories in town, and Finn Kringstad, from Langevåg, who was the caretaker at the Devold factory for half a century and still turns up to tidy the flowerpots. "A lot of people my age are returning from big cities to Ålesund, bringing new ideas," says Flakk's eldest daughter, 29-year-old Maria, who helps run 62° Nord. "When it comes to travel, there will always be box tickers and Instagrammers, but I think more of my generation are now interested in staying in a place longer, and people are seeing the value in traditional ways of life."

This is the land of *friluftsliv*, or respect for outdoor living, and *dugnad*, communal volunteering; of the Mountain Code ("Don't be ashamed to turn around") and the right to roam through any private property as long as it's undeveloped. As a child, Flakk would spend weekends in the cabin his parents built in the Sunnmøre Alps, and when he was in the Boy Scouts they would go on overnight ski trips, sleeping in snow caves they had dug themselves. "When →



A guest room at the Storffjord Hotel



62° Nord's expedition boat docked at Hotel Union Øye

I was growing up, we had to go for a family hike or cross-country ski tour every single Sunday, no matter what the weather was like,” says Maria. “I used to hate it sometimes, but it instilled a really strong connection with the outdoors. There’s a Norwegian saying, *du angret aldri på en tur*—‘You will never regret a hike.’ I love going to the island of Giske, about a 15-minute drive from Ålesund. The wind is always blowing. I head out there with friends when the winter storms are coming, sitting in the car with a hot coffee and watching the weather. The surf spot of Alnes is right around the corner.”

Another Flakk family favorite is the hotel at Storffjord, with a jetty to jump off for cold-water swimming all year round and hiking trails in every direction. Hand-built with logs from the forest, it has a turf roof atop layers of birch bark to make it waterproof. Inside there are woolen rugs and throws; antique wooden farm tools salvaged from the surrounding countryside, whittled during long winter days and nights; trays and ladles; an intricate press used to make patterns on butter. The menu at the hotel’s restaurant gathers a topographic selection from forest and mountain, sourcing meat from local farms and beer from microbreweries. The chefs forage seaweed, wild garlic, and birch sap. They make kombucha from raspberries and beets.

Hiking in spring here is exhilarating, alongside waterfalls that foam and crash as

the snow and ice melt. “You get a certain peace of mind,” says Maria. She talks of the weather—“everyone always talks about the weather”—of how in winter people cross their fingers for the *nordvesten*, the northwest winds, which swirl snow up to the mountains, and of *rimfrost*, when your breath sparkles with crystals in the freezing air. But most evocative of all is *blåtimen*, the blue hour, that special time after the sun sets but before complete darkness creeps in, a time for watching the water on the fjord and the peaks fade from view, a time of calm at the day’s end. ■

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62° Nord offers a five-night itinerary from \$12,175, full board, including two nights each at Storffjord Hotel and Hotel Union Øye and one night at Hotel Brosundet, plus private kayaking, skiing, a helicopter tour, and boat trip. 62.no for details. Doubles at Hotel Brosundet from \$175; brosundet.no

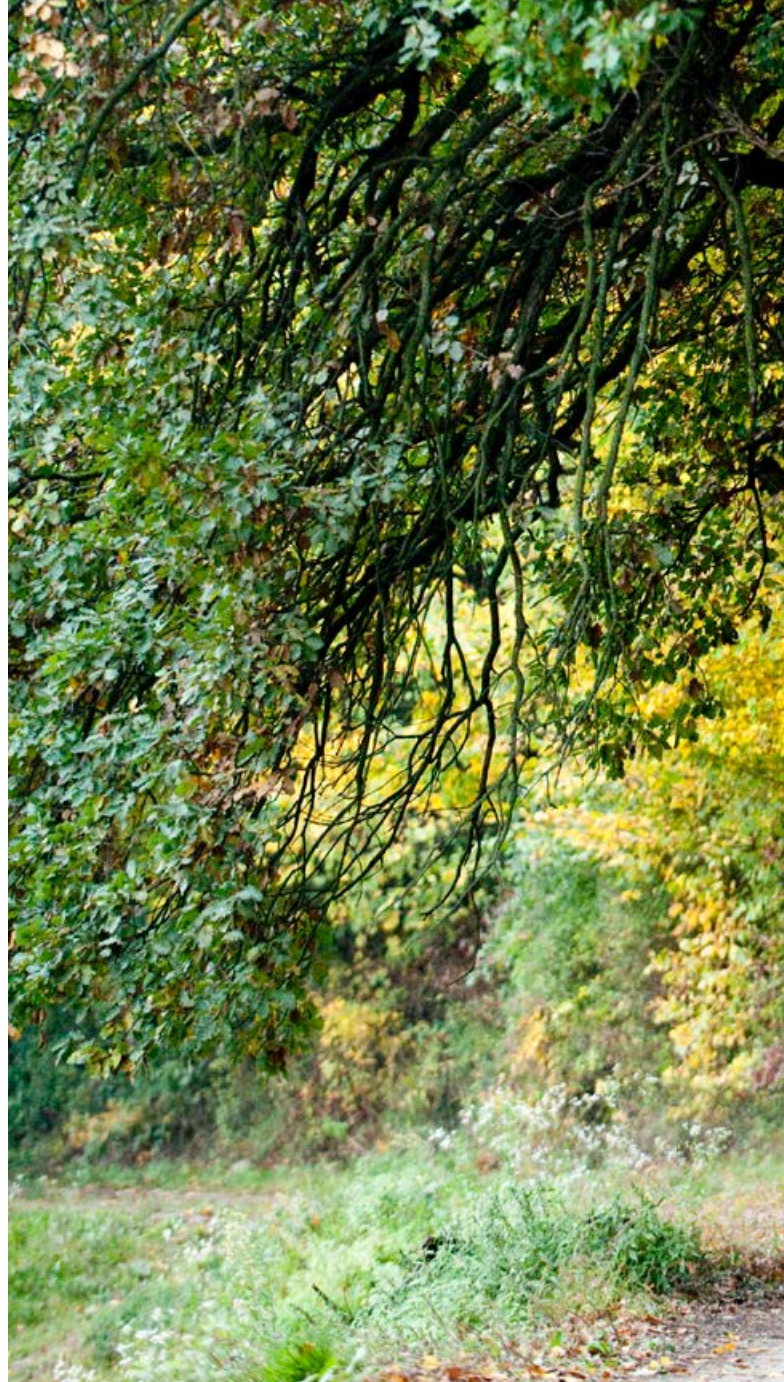
## Life in the Slow Lane

Locals in Piedmont and the Aosta Valley protect Italy's future by embracing a more environmentally conscious past

*By Adam Gollner*



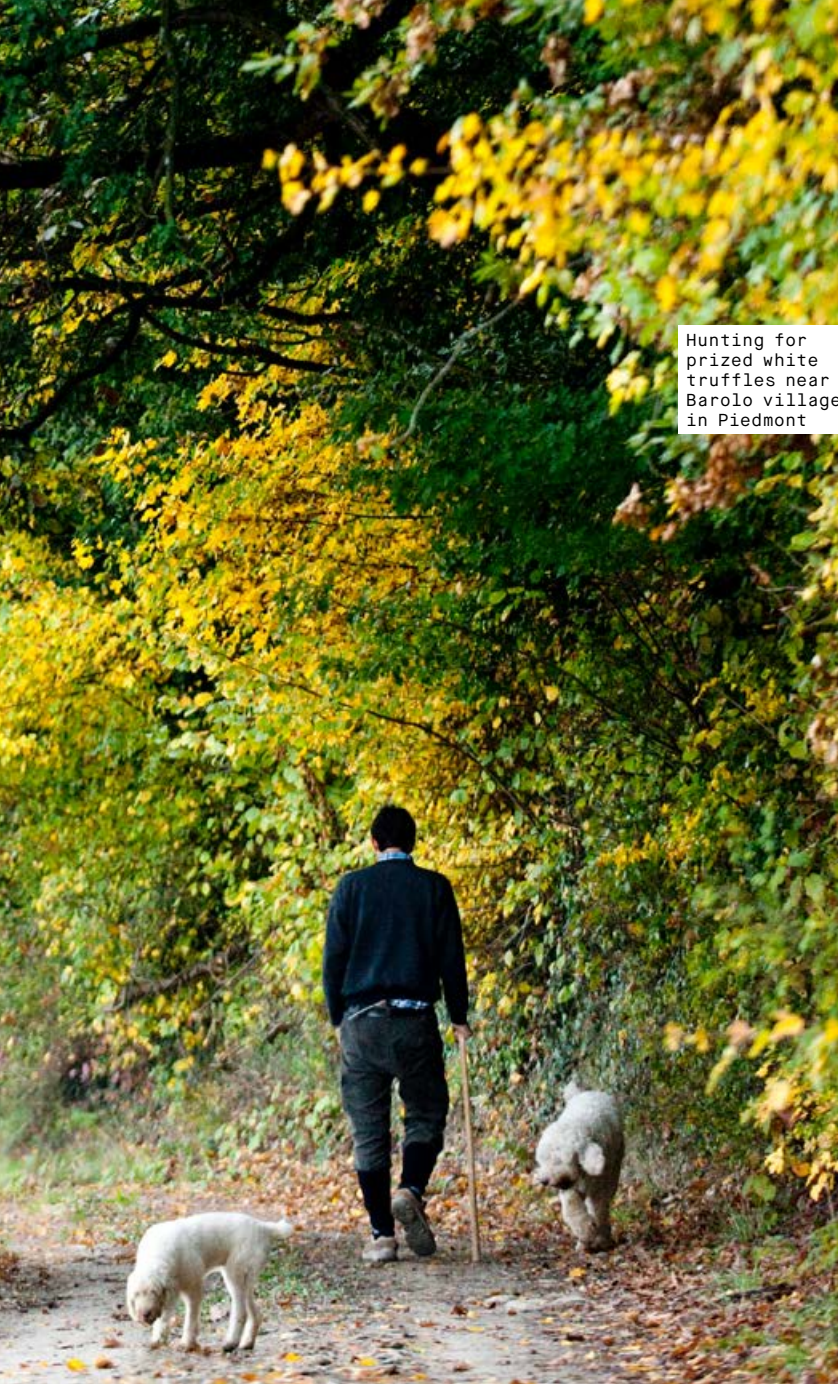
Fontina-laced risotto is the specialty at Lou Ressonnon in Cogne



**I recently came across a salad** so exceptional that it made me hopeful for the future. The lettuces responsible for this flutter of optimism weren't your typical green insalate: They were a rainbow-hued selection of biodynamically grown flowers, herbs, and leaves handpicked from the gardens of the three-Michelin-starred restaurant Piazza Duomo in Alba, a quiet medieval town in Northern Italy.

The salad, all bright emeralds and red-veined shoots and yellow blossoms, arrived at the table like an edible Matisse painting: super tweezery and technically precise in its fancy, almost extraterrestrial plating, yet made from the simplest, most rustic ingredients. With almost no dressing to enhance (or mask) its true flavors, every bite came together in sweet-tart vegetal harmony. The secret to the dish,

PHOTOGRAPHS: LOU RESSONNON COGNE, SUSAN WRIGHT



Hunting for prized white truffles near Barolo village in Piedmont

chef Enrico Crippa explained, is that the produce is harvested fresh each morning. “They’re organic and local, yes, but they’re also unrefrigerated and haven’t been transported by truck,” he noted. “Many guests have told me that our greens remind them of their childhood or their grandparents. At the same time, the food we prepare here is futuristic. That double vision is the essence of Northern Italy.”

I came here, to Piedmont and the Aosta Valley, in early 2020 to see what that backward-forward approach looks like today. Italy is the birthplace of Slow Food International—an organization that started in 1989 to counteract the fast-food-ification of the world by celebrating local culinary traditions. Its manifesto is a defense of pleasure: “Homo sapiens must regain wisdom and liberate itself from

the ‘velocity’ that is propelling it on the road to extinction. Let us defend ourselves against the universal madness of ‘the fast life’ with tranquil material pleasure.” Long before the zero-waste movement, Slow Food showed us that taking it easy and being mindful of our senses isn’t just sensible—it can help combat climate change.

Slow Food has spawned other cultural movements—including slow travel, a similarly minded ethos that honors a place’s most authentic attributes and fosters genuine connections with local people. In a post-pandemic world, this kind of immersive travel could become more relevant than ever as travelers reassess their reasons for taking trips. In the three decades since its founding, Slow Food has helped Europeans rediscover something crucial: Keeping the past alive isn’t simply an exercise in nostalgia—it’s a way to protect the planet and usher in a more sustainable future.

It didn’t take me long after arriving in Alba to realize how everything that sprouts from the soil of the surrounding hills tastes transcendent, from the famous white truffles (which, in autumn, are available to purchase—and, more importantly, sniff—at the local market) to the regal red wines of Barolo, with their notes of roses and loamy soil. Even the hazelnuts that grow around here are transportive, as I discovered when I ate a few—roasted, with nothing else added—at the Altalanga Azienda Agricola shop in the center of town. How amazing to see that something as simple and healthy as a hazelnut, grown in the right conditions, can taste so otherworldly.

As any Italophile knows, a fascinating expression of the Slow Food philosophy can be found at the Eataly chain, which began in Piedmont and now has

37 locations around the world. The original Eataly outlet was opened in Turin by the Farinetti family in 2007. By following a basic motto inspired by Slow Food—“good, clean, and fair”—the company scaled artisanal Italian-made fare into a superstore setting. It believes that each of us can do our part to make the world a cleaner place by spending on ethically sourced products. Now the Farinettis hope to replicate Eataly’s global success by launching a bio-sustainability emporium called Green Pea. The first location opened on December 8, directly beside Eataly in Turin, with additional outlets slated for London, Dubai, Paris, and Los Angeles.

“Green Pea is a place where everything, from clothes to electronics, is environmentally conscious,” explains Francesco Farinetti, Oscar Farinetti’s eldest scion and heir apparent. “Nowadays we all look at the ingredients in the food we eat. But nobody reads the label when they buy a T-shirt. And yet the fashion industry is a major cause of pollution in the world.”

The NH Turin Lingotto Congress hotel represents another step in the right direction. The former Fiat factory was transformed into 240 high-ceilinged rooms, some of whose immense windows open onto the Alps or look out on a charming →

## why we travel → sustainability

garden below. But all across the region, other hotels in Northern Italy, no matter how old, are embracing urban revitalization and advanced renewable-energy solutions. The use of solar photovoltaic panels at Castello di Guarene, an 18th-century castle originally built for the counts of Roero atop a hill just outside of Alba, have led to CO<sub>2</sub> savings of approximately 4,000 tons a year—the equivalent of a thousand cars' annual emissions. It's easy to fall asleep in one of this Relais & Chateaux palace's 15 suites when you realize that preserving deep historical roots can also mean being eco-friendly.

Another climate champion is the fairy-tale Bellevue Hotel & Spa in Cogne, an art-filled heritage site from 1925 inside the Aosta Valley's Gran Paradiso National Park. Having eliminated most single-use plastics on its premises, it also built a system that allows the property to serve only pure glacier water from the park. And in line with Slow Food guidelines, its three excellent on-site restaurants all feature "zero-kilometer" cooking, meaning dishes using ingredients that have been sourced from the immediate vicinity.

What is now the oldest national park in Italy, Gran Paradiso became a 173,715-acre preserve in 1922 when King Vittorio Emanuele II donated it to the state for that purpose. (He'd previously declared the area a royal hunting reserve to save the alpine ibex, a species of wild mountain goat that was on the verge of extinction.) As a result of that forward-thinking decision, as well as a later prohibition on building in protected areas, the meadows here are still carpeted in wildflowers in the summer, and those hiking in the park often spot herds of ibex or chamois. The Gran Paradiso certification program has helped Bellevue and others in their sustainability efforts, making Cogne—a hamlet that attracts hikers, ice climbers, and seekers of old-school Italian countryside cooking—a surprisingly pleasurable green destination.

One of the finest Slow Food dining experiences in all of Italy can be found right around the corner from Bellevue at Lou Ressonon. It offers soul-satisfying, hearty Aostan fare such as beef carbonade on rustic polenta, or the house specialty, a local fontina-laced risotto called seupetta a la Cogneintse. "These are the dishes we've always eaten in Cogne," says Elisabetta Allera, whose father, Arturo, opened Lou Ressonon in 1966. In an Italy turning toward renewable solutions and zero-waste options, it's refreshing to know that those timeless plates are still made the same way today.



A guest room at Castello di Guarene

On the drive from the Aosta Valley back to Turin, I turned off the A5 to visit the historic vineyards of Cantina dei Produttori Nebbiolo di Carema, a Slow Food winemaking cooperative that offers tastings and bottles for sale at its town-center cantina. These traditional mountain vineyards were designed to withstand harsh meteorological conditions—which today also protects them against climate change. Surveying the vines and the towering Alps in every direction, I couldn't help feeling that, no matter what the future holds, in this part of Italy, at least, it is certain to be delicious. As I reached into the pocket of my jacket, I noticed something rattling around: It was a small packet of seeds from Piazza Duomo in Alba, a gift given to every diner at the end of their meal. Changing our ways takes time, but as I've learned through my own slow travel, every step counts. ■



The storybook Grande-Anse Lighthouse, on Chaleur Bay

## Lightness of Being

In search of fresh seafood, warm-water beaches, and that elusive *joie de vivre*, *Shelley Cameron-McCarron* heads to Canada's Acadian Coast

**My plan in coming to New Brunswick** wasn't to learn about *Alice in Wonderland* and the importance of fun. But that's what happens to me at Le Moque-Tortue, a restaurant in the town of Shediac, where I sit beneath playing cards strung from the ceiling, surrounded by as many paused clocks, devouring the most perfect lobster roll.

Sébastien Després, owner of the Carroll-esque bistro, is an anthropologist and big-time *Alice* aficionado. At Le Moque-Tortue, he's all in on the *Wonderland* theme. The name is a reference to the scene in which Alice meets the Mock Turtle and learns to dance the Lobster Quadrille. It's an inside joke about Shediac, which locals call the World Lobster Capital.



The Moonsnail Pearl Dome at Cielo Glamping Maritime

Flowers and macramé at Cielo Glamping Maritime, in Haut-Shipagan



“The book says a lot about our perceptions,” explains Després as his youngest daughter, Alice, toddles between his legs. “The world is upside down; it’s a view of games and fun and what life really should be....We tend not to think of fun, and I feel that’s a problem. Stuffiness isn’t fun. That’s something that Alice would say.”

The Acadian coast of New Brunswick is in Canada’s Maritime region, in the largest of three provinces on the Atlantic Ocean. The Acadians of the Maritimes, North America’s first French settlers, are legendary for their indomitable love of life, and that’s what my husband and I seek as we joyride more than 600 miles from our home in neighboring Nova Scotia along New Brunswick’s coast, tracing a route from Shediac up to Bathurst and on to the northern tip of the Acadian Peninsula. On our first out-of-province road trip since the start of the pandemic, we’re eager for a bit of playfulness.

The countryside is punctuated with boats, boardwalks, and wildlife. We brake for a mama bear and her cubs—and later, a gangly moose. As English gives way to French, we begin to see the blue, white, and red of the Acadian flag, with its Stella Maris adorning lighthouses and telephone poles.

Without fail, we’re welcomed wherever we go. At a restaurant in Miramichi, the largest city in northern New Brunswick, a server calls his mom for insider tips. In the far-north hamlet of Petit-Paquetville, the co-owner of Distillerie Fils du Roy, Sébastien Roy, offers an impromptu tour and tasting. We’re as smitten by his gin as by the storied local history he celebrates on evocative, artsy labels.

In Shediac, after the lobster roll at Le Moque-Tortue, we pose next to a nearly 200,000-pound lobster sculpture and learn about the crustacean’s life cycle at the

compact yet impressive Homarus Eco-Centre on Pointe-du-Chêne wharf. There’s a terrific chocolatier, Adorable Chocolat, where we snag almond-chocolate croissants before zipping 30 minutes up Route 11 to Le Pays de la Sagouine, which translates to The Land of the Washerwoman. It’s an über-colorful theme town with food and music based on the fictional Acadian playground in Antonine Maillet’s *La Sagouine*, a novel that celebrates its 50th birthday in 2021. Visitors walk a footbridge to Île-aux-Puces, a small →



The serene Restigouche River

island in Bouctouche Bay, where costumed actors bring the characters to life. Jokes fly and fiddles blaze, though there are serious moments too. An important part of the experience is learning about Le Grand Dérangement, the French colonists' shameful expulsion by the British from 1755 to 1763.

This is beach country, home to Canada's warmest saltwater (up to 84 degrees Fahrenheit in summer). To see it right, cruise coastal Route 475 to Irving Eco-Centre: La dune de Bouctouche, where three sets of stairs from a wooden boardwalk grant access to one of the last great dunes in this corner of North America. Estimated to be 2,000 years old, the dunes change with every major storm. When it's windy, you may see only seagulls. When it's calm, there are often cranes, foxes, and deer.

Before our night's stop in Miramichi, a village steeped in Irish influence and fabled salmon fishing, we push up Route 117—past tidy homes, steeped churches, and cliffs carved by wind and wave—to a

monument at Escuminac wharf commemorating the 1959 hurricane in Miramichi Bay. The ground beneath our feet is where scores waited for news: 22 of 45 boats lost, 35 fishermen gone, and 24 widows and 83 fatherless children left behind.

En route to the Acadian Peninsula the next day, we rent bikes from Kayak Péninsule near Villégiature Deux Rivières Resort in Tracadie-Sheila. The cycling route, *Véloroute de la Péninsule Acadienne*, wows with nearly 200 miles of paved path paralleling small communities, forest, marsh, and sea. Giddy and grateful for the freedom, we sail through this sprawling nature, pausing by a little bridge to snap photos and breathe in the salty air.

Fishing's importance to the area is evident in Shippagan, home to the New Brunswick Aquarium and Marine Centre, where massive, colorful crab boats sit in moorings during the off-season. "We're definitely going there," exclaims my husband. "Did you see the size of those boats?"

Crossing later to the Acadian isles, at the tip of the peninsula, we stop in Lamèque to see the shingled Sainte-Cécile Catholic church. Its plain exterior belies an unusually beautiful—and acoustically gifted—interior that explodes with candy-colored imagery painted by a former parish priest and helpers. I don't know where to look first: In 1968, Father Gerard d'Astous splashed joy into every nook. Pastel candles, crosses, and more peek out from walls and ceiling.

Continuing to Miscou Island, we cross an arched causeway bordered by fishing





The Hub bar at Cielo Glamping Maritime

fleets where seagulls soar, taking in the pungency of low tide. We've come to windswept, wild Miscou for the Miscou Island Lighthouse, the oldest wooden lighthouse in the Maritimes (circa 1856). It stands at New Brunswick's northeastern edge like Canada's keeper, an Acadian chanteuse once mused. We spend an idyllic afternoon skipping stones, birding, and traipsing along a boardwalk over peat bogs, which carpet about half the island. Sun warms our shoulders as we try to identify blue-black berries and scan for orchids, gems of the bog, in a landscape so foreign it carries a whiff of a mystery.

One of our last stops, an hour's drive away, is Caraquet, known as the capital of L'Acadie, near the popular Village Historique Acadien. We delight in the pin-straight road—no side streets, just sea on one side and town on the other.

Here, Victorian elegance reigns our final night, in a third-floor suite overlooking Chaleur Bay. Hôtel Paulin, built in 1891, is one of Canada's oldest family-run Acadian inns. It's helmed by third-generation hotelier Gérard Paulin and his wife, Karen Mersereau, who also runs the namesake restaurant. Earlier, she picked the blueberries that fill our tarts and joined local fishermen in the icy waters of the North Atlantic to source the Belle Baie cold-water shrimp on our plates. As we feast on grilled wild oysters and sustainably farmed Arctic char, good wine flows and we fall into leisurely conversation with our fellow guests. The celebration is unexpected, and I can't help but savor the hospitality and good-heartedness that have been our constant companions. We're not from here, yet it feels somehow that we, too, have come home. ■

## Trip Planner

### GETTING HERE

Fly into the Greater Moncton Roméo LeBlanc International Airport, rent a car, and be on the dock devouring a lobster roll in 20 minutes. If arriving by car, Shediac is about 180 miles—a three-hour drive—from the U.S. border crossing at Calais, Maine.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Hôtel Paulin** (rooms from \$122; [hotelpaulin.com](http://hotelpaulin.com)) in Caraquet exudes Old World charm with its antiques and upscale dining. For a luxe camping experience, the recently opened **Cielo Glamping Maritime** (from \$370 for two nights; [en.glampingcielo.com](http://en.glampingcielo.com)) in Haut-Shippagan earns rave reviews for its geodesic domes parked on a secluded cove. **The Rodd Miramichi River** hotel (from \$115; [roddvacations.com](http://roddvacations.com)) has spacious rooms with kitchenettes, some of which open onto patios with dreamy water views. Plus, the on-site **1809 Restaurant & Bar** is one of Miramichi's best.

### WHERE TO SHOP

It's worth driving to Caraquet just for the artisanal breads from **Grains de folie**, a bistro in a century-old building. Other road trip gold: natural soaps and skin care from **Olivier Soapery** in Ste-Anne-de-Kent; hand-poured soy candles at colorful **Aloha Café-Boutique** in Lamèque; art and glassware at Miramichi's vintage and antiques shops; and who knows what from **Guy's Frenchys** in Shediac, the Maritimes' most iconic secondhand clothing chain. S.C.M.

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# Here's to the Future

*We've locked down, canceled trips, and spent countless milestones—birthdays, graduations, honeymoons—cooped up at home. But with an end in sight, it's time for a do-over. Time to dream again. To book that cruise, map out an epic road trip, or plan a family reunion. To remind ourselves why we travel in the first place—to celebrate ourselves, one another, and the world.*



A private dinner on an uninhabited atoll in the Maldives



## Affordable Adventures for New Grads

### → One week in Puerto Rico

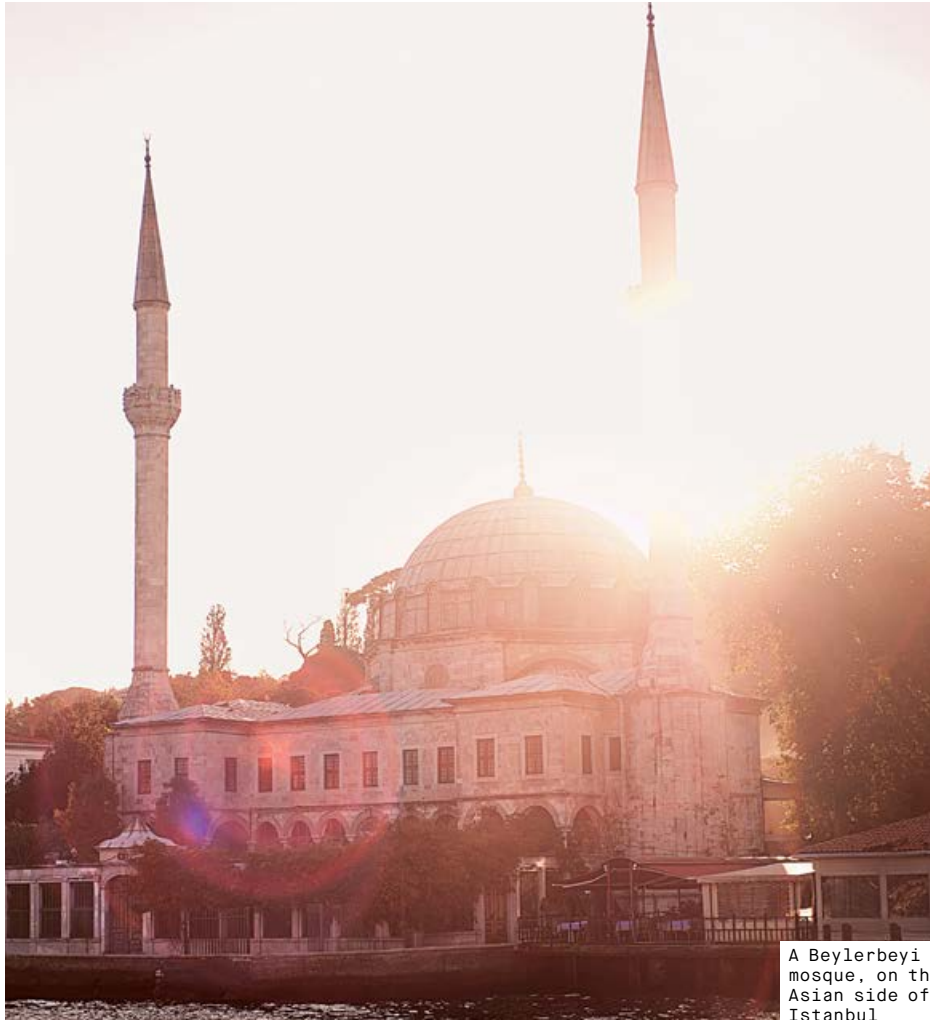
It's an easy flight from most parts of the U.S., and you don't even need a passport. Book an Airbnb in one of the candy-colored buildings of Old San Juan, where reggaeton and salsa fill the streets and the cocktail bar La Factoria comes alive seven nights a week, before tackling a multistop road trip around the island. Make sure to work in night kayaking in one of the three bioluminescent bays and a visit to the dazzling white sands of Culebra Island.

### → Two weeks in India

The Real South India itinerary from Intrepid Travel takes up to 16 free spirits (ages 18 to 29) from Hyderabad to Kochi, with five stops and two overnight trains in between. See Bollywood movie sets in Ramoji Film City, explore Hindu temples in Mamallapuram, watch elephants and tigers in Bandipur National Park, and feast on stuffed dosa in Madurai. The rate covers guides, accommodations, select meals, and numerous activities. *From \$909 per person; [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com)*

### → A month in South America

Put that Spanish to good use on a backpacking tour of the continent's northwestern corner, where flights are more affordable thanks to new budget lines such as Viva Air Colombia and Star Perú. By trip's end, your checked boxes should include visits to Colombia's Tayrona National Natural Park, the Uyuni salt flats of southwest Bolivia, the Amazon rain forest (accessible via Iquitos, Peru), and, of course, Machu Picchu. *MEGAN SPURRELL*



A Beylerbeyi mosque, on the Asian side of Istanbul

the graduation road trip

## Lessons Learned

**As two friends from business school** cut a rug to Michel Teló on a dance floor in İzmir, I knew: This friendship would be a lifelong affair. Our road trip in Turkey was a spontaneous call. We yearned for mild evenings, stops at carts laden with pomegranates, and drives that would give us space to talk for hours. We found all of that along the jagged Aegean coast. A ferry across the Marmara Sea took us to the gateway of Bandırma; a rented Peugeot did the rest. In Behramkale, onetime abode of Aristotle, we feasted on rich Memecik olives. In the historic mineral spa of Pamukkale, we dipped our toes into surreal travertine pools. In Ephesus, one of the ancient world's grandest settlements, we ambled along the columned Arcadian Way. Washing off the dust from our journey at Çemberlitaş Hamamı, a magnificent bath in Istanbul, we delighted in our newfound closeness, a school bond cemented somewhere on the road. *YULIA DENISYUK*



the solo honeymoon

# Love, Actually

*Inspired by his friends' idyllic postnuptial vacay in Kyushu, Richard Morgan learns to say "I do" to himself*

**I had the run of the place.** I'd arrived at Spa Ryokan Sanga, in the town of Kurokawa Onsen, at just the right time of the afternoon; the last wave of guests had already checked out, and new ones had yet to take their place. I changed into my cotton *yukata*, or bathrobe, slipped on my sandals, and made my way to a large round wooden hot tub in a forested nook overlooking a rushing river and an abandoned footbridge. As the sun set, the open-air room filled with *komorebi*—light shimmering through the trees. Pure travel magic.

What heightened the experience was that every bit of it—the town, the hotel, the robe, the tub—was stolen.

Friends of mine who had honeymooned in Japan in 2018 came back raving about Kurokawa Onsen, up in the mountains of Kyushu. The following summer, on a work trip in nearby Fukuoka, I hijacked their trip for myself. The Japanese have a specific word for traveling alone: *hitoritabi*. The timing dovetailed well with my impending 40th birthday. When you're that age and single, you come to a reckoning that maybe the only special someone in your life is you. The obvious solution is to bake



celebration into your everyday existence.

Most of my solo trips had been the travel equivalent of sweatpants—unfailingly casual, akin to a shoulder shrug. So I took a question singles often ponder—*Would you date yourself?*—and wildly upped the ante: *Would you honeymoon by yourself?*

That's how I ended up in that tub, taking the most memorable breaths of my life. It was a deeply intimate moment—me and the world, me with the world, me in the world. I'm amazed that the Japanese, in addition to having words for solo travel and forest light, don't have one for the first full-body exhale of a lavish vacation. They should.

The evening continued with a 10-course dinner. "For me?!" I squealed when the kimono-clad server brought me to my private dining room. Afterward, sated, I warmed myself at the firepit, flames licking its copper basin. I slept starfish-style, which I'd like to see honeymooners attempt.

The next morning I found an outdoor waterfall bath at Ikoi Ryokan, along with a little shop where I bought a koi tapestry. But my favorite spot was the warm cave baths of the ryokan Yama no Yado Shinmeikan, whose shimmering pools spilled out in a maze of figure-eight loops.

I'd already shed my clothes—but there in the cave, I felt the weight of other worries fall away too: of looming middle age, my win-loss mindset, and even the latent pressures of being in Japan, with its endless

protocols, the bowing and highly choreographed exchange of business cards. Suddenly there was no one to please but myself, and the trip shifted into a pilgrimage to find a new me, a man of possibility more than prudence. You could hardly fault me, already *au naturel*, for engaging in a bit of navel-gazing.

Then, all at once, I really let go and began belting out lines from the *Little Mermaid* tune "Part of Your World." "How many wonders can one cavern hold?" I sang. Just one: this glorious freedom.

I realized when I came out of my reverie that I was no longer alone. There, observing my grand performance, was a group of young, muscly South Korean park rangers on a team-building trip. They, too, were naked.

I blushed. They applauded. We all laughed and went for fried horse-meat patties, a local delicacy, at a nearby diner.

It's not how honeymoons usually go, I know. Or heists. But perhaps honor among thieves could begin with me. I was glad for what I'd consummated on that bachelor's honeymoon: a celebration of myself, party of one.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JENNY ZARINS

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## Extraordinary Honeymoon Escapes

Handpicked by our travel specialists

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### The South Africa Sampler

*Kara Bebell of the Travel Siblings loves the country's city-vineyards-safari mix. She books Ellerman House in Cape Town for its "dramatic setting overlooking the crashing waves of the Atlantic," La Residence in the Cape Winelands ("a perfect pampering before a safari"), and Singita Lebombo Lodge, "where couples can sleep outside under the stars!"*

THETRAVELSIBLINGS.COM

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### An Antarctic Adventure

*Cruising Antarctica allows couples to experience expedition-style travel without sacrificing creature comforts, says David Rubin of DavidTravel. He names Silversea Cruises' all-suite Silver Cloud "a first choice for luxury, with great butler service and excellent guiding."*

FROM \$10,520 PER PERSON;  
DAVIDTRAVEL.COM

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### A Road Trip for Two

*"Nothing is more romantic than honeymooning in a luxury hotel on wheels while seeing the Southwest," says Jody Bear of Bear & Bear Travel. Her R.V.-centric itineraries include horseback riding and mountain biking in places like Zion National Park; lunch at a private Navajo ranch in Utah's Monument Valley; and overnights at Amangiri for its luxurious spa and restaurant.*

BEARANDBEAR.TRAVEL

—LINDSAY LAMBERT DAY

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the bachelorette cruise

## Rock the Boat

**Lazy pool days**, no bar tab, 10 friends, and 1,900 strangers—that was my bachelorette party. Our crew chose a three-day Caribbean sailing with Norwegian Cruise Line largely because of its all-inclusive nature, but also for the convenience of getting together throughout the day. Off the ship we explored Key West (Ernest Hemingway’s six-toed cats were a big hit) and snorkeled on Grand Bahama Island. But my favorite memories unfolded on board, in moments that felt surprisingly intimate—like discovering a quiet upper deck for sunbathing or rearranging the furniture at the bars so we could all sit together. The cruise was the ideal grown-up getaway for a group of early-30-somethings that also gave us the chance to indulge our inner kids, singing our hearts out during karaoke and tucking into late-night soft serve and fries. **STEPHANIE WU**



### Unexpected Getaways for Brides- and Grooms-to-Be

→ **Vineyard hop in Portugal**  
In Alentejo, the hot and dry wine region southeast of Lisbon, vintners are tapping into a global revival of an ancient technique: fermenting wines in clay vessels, or *talhas*. Start the party at Herdade do Rocim, a 247-acre wine and olive estate, before making your way to Cartuxa Winery, in a building founded by Jesuits, and nearby José de Sousa, a vineyard with a collection of seven-foot-tall talhas.

→ **Hike the Isle of Skye**  
The patchwork terrain of Skye—with its jagged peaks, imposing sea cliffs, and medley of moors and lochs—is best explored in the company of locals. Wilderness Scotland’s seven-day itineraries are led by “wilderness therapists” and cover meals, lodging, and transport. The trekking isn’t hard, but it may give some hikers vertigo. To wit: the climb up dizzying Quiraing, a 1,781-foot-high landslip. From \$2,359 per person; [wildernessscotland.com](http://wildernessscotland.com).

→ **Mountain bike through Mayan villages**  
The customizable itineraries from Old Town Outfitters, a adventure travel operator in Antigua, Guatemala, lead guests to Indigenous markets and remote pueblos. The three-day Lake Atitlán Traverse tour climbs high into the 12th-century Iximche town of Patzún and stops at the rim of a volcanic caldera. A stay at La Casa del Mundo, a cliffside eco-hotel, is included. From \$475 per person; [adventureguatemala.com](http://adventureguatemala.com). Y.D.



the destination wedding

# Happy Together

*For Sarah Khan, a save-the-date turned out to be more than just a wedding announcement—it was the catalyst for a never-ending family reunion*

**Was this the eighth event?** The fifth all-nighter? The seventh cake? The 42nd flower garland? At some point I learned to stop counting and just embrace the joyful chaos.

I was in Hyderabad, India, jet-lagged and sleep deprived, for the final stretch of my cousin's wedding. In India the word *wedding* often encompasses not just a single ceremony but a series of events spanning several days; in this case, Saad and Farah's festivities had begun two weeks ago and 8,000 miles away in San Francisco. By now, on day-who-knows-what, the parties, the singing, and the laughter were melting into one endless loop of revelry. "I had to ask my boss for a month off just to get married," Saad said with a chuckle. And that didn't even include the honeymoon.

When your family is spread out across the world—mine is in California, Texas, Massachusetts, Saudi Arabia, and India—weddings are more than a celebration of love: They're an excuse for an epic family reunion. Whenever a wedding is announced, we all start coordinating our flights.

JFK was deserted on Christmas Day in 2019 when I boarded a plane to San Francisco, so I soaked up my last moments of tranquility before



embarking on a whirlwind three-week trip. But even amid the pomp and finery of a traditional wedding, the jubilant moments in between the rituals were the most memorable. The peals of laughter at the *manja* party to kick off the festivities, when we all took turns slathering Saad's face with turmeric paste—and then he chased each of us all over the house to return the favor. The 3 a.m. dance practices where I tried my best to get my uncoordinated cousins to channel their inner Bollywood stars. My sister, Noura, warming up in the car for her knockout rendition of Etta James's "At Last" at the *sanchak-mehndi*, a colorful pre-wedding function filled with music and dancing. Beaming with pride as Saad and his 30 groomsmen nailed the choreographed entrance we'd been polishing in the lobby until just minutes before. The wedding day, when the *dhol* player led our boisterous *baraat*, or groom's procession, down the elegant halls of the Fairmont San Jose. A makeshift spa night with nine of us piled onto a bed, painting Kiehl's masks on one another's faces. The Texan groom blasting country music as we drove around Hyderabad in search of midnight ice cream. Arriving early to the regal *walima*, a reception hosted by my aunt and uncle, at the 18th-century Chowmahalla Palace, to make time for family photos beneath the chandeliers of the Durbar Hall before the guests arrived—then flipping

through the local papers together over breakfast the next morning to glimpse those pictures in the society pages.

There were plenty of other milestones to commemorate during the three-week extravaganza, and the bride and groom were happy to yield the spotlight: surprise cakes marked three birthdays and an anniversary, and an evening of *qawwali* music celebrated the groom's brother Zafar's engagement to Sheema.

When we left Hyderabad last January, we planned to do it all over again in six months. Instead, when Sheema and Zafar's nuptials rolled around in July, I woke up at 4 a.m. to watch the *nikah*, an Islamic ceremony, live-streamed from India; in December we all reunited on Zoom for a scaled-down series of events celebrating the couple in Dubai. Before last year, my biggest worry was that we'd eventually run out of cousins' weddings we could use as an excuse to get together. Now I know I need to seize every chance I can to see my family, weddings or not. But first, 2021 owes us a do-over for Zafar and Sheema—and I can't wait to book that flight.

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## Alternative Spots for Family Reunions

Handpicked by our travel specialists

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### The Chilean Wilderness

*Excursions at Chile's adventure lodges range from chill (stargazing) to challenging (volcano treks), making them ideal for multigenerational gatherings. Plus, says Passported's Leslie Overton, set meal times mean no debating when and where to eat each night. She suggests staying in Patagonia, the Atacama, or the Lake District and adding a few nights at a vineyard property, especially Vik Chile, for wine tastings.*

PASSPORTED.COM

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### A Ranch Retreat

*Western ranches "fit the bill for privacy, fun, outside space, relaxation, and adventure," says Jules Maury, who heads Scott Dunn Private. For buyouts she likes the nine-room Granite Lodge at Montana's Ranch at Rock Creek, which offers photography workshops, scavenger hunts, and mountain biking. There's also a club for kids, the Little Grizzlies.*

SCOTTDUNN.COM/US

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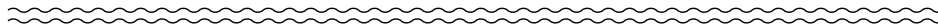
### The Hacienda Takeover

*Throughout Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, 19th-century haciendas have been transformed into intimate boutique hotels, and Modern Adventure's Luis Vargas says they're perfect for reunions—close to archaeological sites, nature reserves, and cenotes. His go-tos: Hacienda Temozon, Hacienda Sac Chich, and Chablé Yucatán.*

MODERNADVENTURE.COM — L. L. D.

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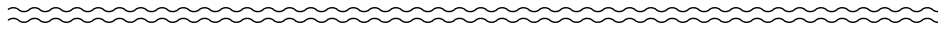


A view of redwoods from Canyon Ranch Woodside

the babyboom

## Nothing to Kid About

“Don’t worry if it gets in your mouth—it’s edible,” the esthetician whispered, painting a mask of hot wildflower honey and extra virgin olive oil onto my face. The sensation was divine, enhanced by the chill of a rose quartz wand conducting a lymphatic drainage massage. My husband and I had made the right call squeezing in one last pre-baby trip—and making it wellness-centered—at the year-old Canyon Ranch Woodside retreat, 45 minutes from San Francisco. Even I, an unwavering beach bum, couldn’t deny the tranquility of this beguiling place, ensconced in a lacy redwood forest. Armed with a seamless itinerary (a program adviser helps design every guest’s journey), we took slow-motion walks in the hushed woods, painted with watercolors, admired pink skies from the wraparound deck, and cozied up for talks about presentness. It was the first time I’ve ever said of a menu, “I’ll have it all!” with no shame, for the food, sourced from local regenerative farms, was portioned perfectly. My prenatal massage was also guiltless. Thirty weeks in, my baby was my barometer for relaxation: The more soothed I felt, the more she kicked. As fingers danced up and down my spine, rooting out knots, she wriggled in appreciation. On this vacation, happy baby meant happy parents. KATHRYN ROMEYN



## Last Hurrahs for Expecting Couples

→ **Flee to the Caribbean**

At Beaches Turks & Caicos in Providenciales, 12 miles of frangible beach fringe a Pantone aqua ocean, offering opportunities for snorkeling, paddleboarding, and sailing. The all-inclusive resort’s pirate-themed water park and kids clubs will babysit future big brothers or sisters too, making it easier for the adults to enjoy a romantic dinner or pampering prenatal massage. *From \$390 per night; beaches.com/turksandcaicos*

→ **Have a city fling in Austin**

For dancing at Antone’s, shopping on South Congress, or people-watching at Barton Springs, lock in a room at Commodore Perry Estate, Auberge Resorts Collection. Guests can laze around a glamorous circular pool, get their palms read, or join a candlelit meditation. For a unique memento, sit for a portrait in the library and it’ll be turned into a Victorian-inspired silhouette ring. *From \$459 per night; aubergeresorts.com/commodoreperry*

→ **Camp near Acadia National Park**

Squishing into a sleeping bag won’t entice most pregnant couples. But glamping in one of the luxe safari-style tents sprinkled across 100 acres of virgin meadow and coastline in Maine? That’s the Under Canvas way. The new Acadia property, opening May 13 in Surry, promises en suite bathrooms and—in 15 of the tents—windows above the king-size beds for the comfiest stargazing imaginable. *From \$314 per night; undercanvas.com/acadia K.R.*

celebration travel



the mother-daughter trip

# A River Runs Through It

*For Kristin Braswell and her equally headstrong mom, a holiday cruise on the Danube offers an ideal compromise*

**I had her at *The Sound of Music*.** After weeks of trying to narrow down our travel plans, we finalized our decision based on my mother's love of a movie she'd been able to recite since childhood. A mutual desire to explore the Christmas markets of Europe also helped.

My mom and I have traveled together for almost two decades. Her collection of souvenir magnets has grown so large you can hardly tell the color of her refrigerator. When I left our hometown of Los Angeles to work in New York, we decided to meet up in a new place each year as a celebratory reunion—and something of a peace treaty between two willful humans. When I say “up,” she says “down,” but we'll always meet in the middle for travel. We share a curiosity and passion for new experiences—and great food—that transcends everything else.

For our most recent reunion, we landed at Munich's airport at three o'clock in the morning. The cold winds



Top row, from left: The Hungarian Parliament building in Budapest; a cozy nook at Szimpla Kert, one of the city's famous ruin bars; downtown boutique Pauza; bathtub seating at Szimpla Kert. Bottom row, from left: The Am Hof Christmas market in Vienna; sunrise on the western banks of the Danube River in Budapest; a tram in Vienna; Várkert Bazár in Budapest

knocked the jet lag out of our bodies. After a long bus ride, we arrived at the port in Vilshofen an der Donau to begin our seven-day journey aboard an AmaWaterways Danube River cruise, with stops in Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria. It was in that last country that my *Sound of Music*-obsessed mother would finally get to see Basilika St. Michael in Mondsee, where Maria and Baron Georg Von Trapp were married, and Mirabell Gardens, the Salzburg site of Julie Andrews's forever-catchy rendition of "Do-Re-Mi." The musical top notes made it easy to overlook that this was a romance-themed cruise. Watching couples from around the world do the wobble dance and drunk-waltz to Dolly Parton was the Christmas gift we never knew we needed.

On board, my mom and I joined in beer tastings, movie nights, spinning classes on the deck, and as many buffets as our stomachs could handle. We sailed past medieval villages and hillside vineyards and stopped in small German towns I'd never heard of, like Passau, where we glimpsed the ornate St. Stephen's Cathedral. In Vienna we slid our forks into a slice of apple strudel topped with whipped cream at Café Landtmann and split a plate of bratwurst and frankfurters at Leo Würstelstand, one of the city's oldest sausage stands. In Budapest we climbed to the historic Buda Castle to take in the magnificent views,

then rewarded ourselves with cinnamon-spiced mulled wine and Hungarian chimney cake, a sugar-dusted cylindrical bread that's crunchy on the outside and fluffy in the middle. Even frigid weather couldn't slow us down; we ended the night at one of Budapest's oldest ruin bars, Szimpla Kert, in the Jewish quarter. The multilevel haunt was filled with salvaged furniture, including bathtubs for bar goers to lounge in.

The Christmas markets, of course, were everything we imagined they would be: an explosion of dazzling lights and sparkling ornaments, the air redolent of roasted chestnuts, the cheer of strangers palpable. We laughed at the fiery jolt inside our chests—the result of drinking one too many warm rum punches, served to us in boot-shaped mugs decorated with snowflakes. Today those boots sit on my mother's windowsill in Los Angeles, across from her fridge covered in magnets—all of them kitschy, colorful reminders of our commitment to celebrating travel, and each other, even if it means meeting halfway. *From \$2,899 per person; amawaterways.com.*

## Cruises for the Whole Crew

Handpicked by our travel specialists

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### The Inside Passage

*Southeast Alaska is home to bald eagles, whales, and bears—"iconic animals that appeal to all ages," says ExpeditionTrips founder Ashton Palmer, who favors small ships for their range of activities (kayaking, snorkeling) and intimate spaces for swapping stories. His top pick: UnCruise Adventures' seven-night sailings aboard the 84-passenger*

Safari Endeavour.

FROM \$6,295 PER PERSON;  
EXPEDITIONTRIPS.COM

...

### The European Escape

*Angela Turen of Churchill & Turen loves Disney Cruise Line's six-night Mediterranean itinerary—round trip from Barcelona, with stops in Cannes and Salerno—aboard the Disney Magic. Port excursions include pizza making in Rome, while onboard offerings cater to kids (breakfast with Mickey) and adults (nightclubs) alike.*

FROM \$3,582 FOR TWO;  
TRAVELTRUTH.COM

...

### The Nile Voyage

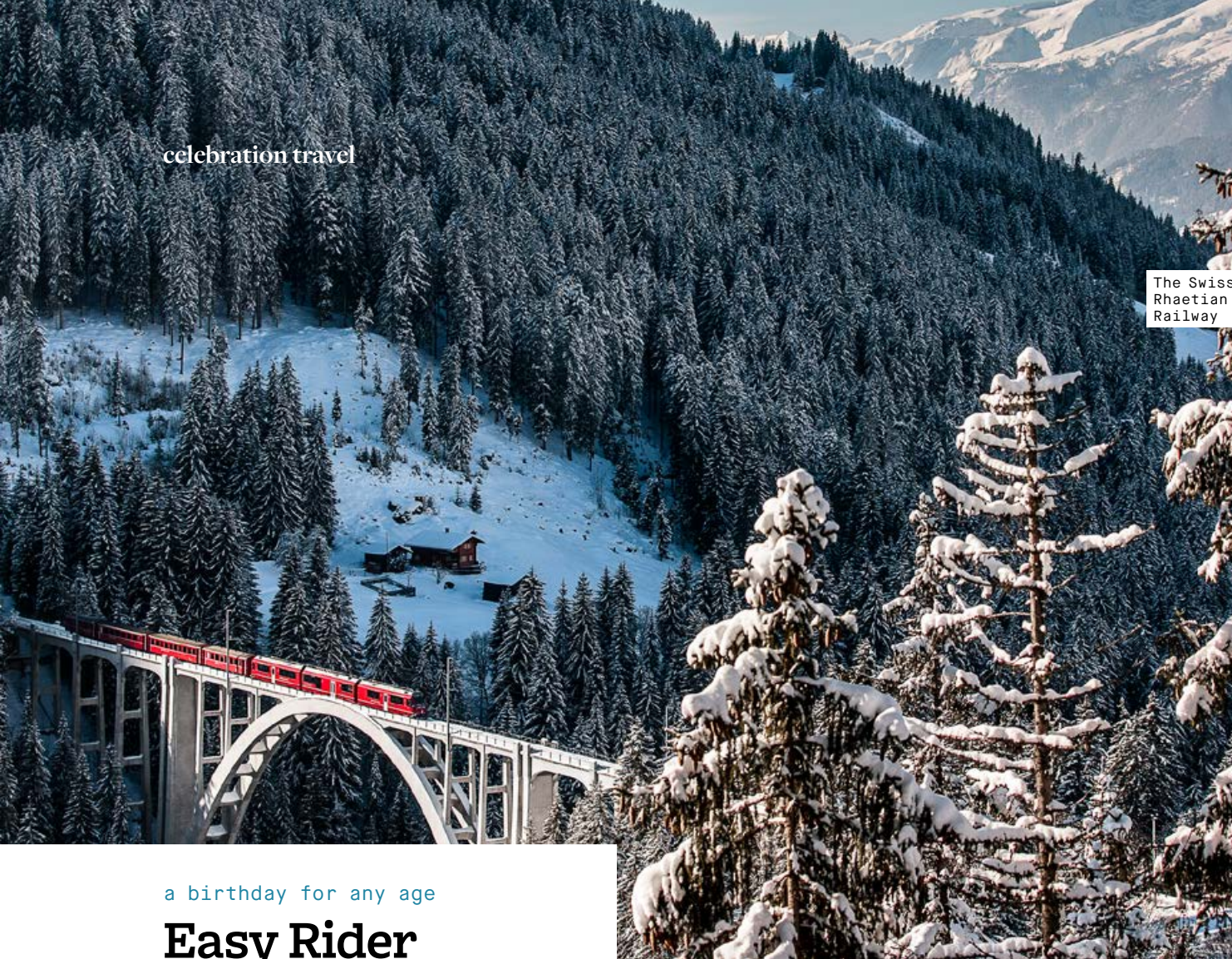
*"Egypt offers an extraordinary edu-experience for all," says CruiseCenter's Tom Baker, who recommends Mayfair Cruises' Nile River itineraries between Luxor and Aswan aboard the new M.S. Mayflower. These trips combine ancient temples with heart-pounding adventures such as hot-air ballooning.*

FROM \$180 PER PERSON PER NIGHT, BASED ON DOUBLE OCCUPANCY; CRUISECENTER.COM

—L.L.D.

celebration travel

The Swiss  
Rhaetian  
Railway



a birthday for any age

## Easy Rider

**To reduce our carbon footprint**, my husband and I decided to swap long-haul destination birthday travel with stay-on-the-ground getaways. It was in that spirit that we recently set out for a wellness weekend from our home in Zurich to Samedan's Mineralbad & Spa, located in a 12th-century Alpine village plaza. The soak was edifying, but our three-hour ride on the Rhaetian Railway was the unexpected highlight—and a reflective break from high-speed travel. Built in 1889, it is one of five UNESCO-listed trains worldwide. Its cherry red carriages rattle past bony massifs, hypnotic waterfalls, and cerulean glaciers, their route made possible by 84 tunnels and 383 bridges. The scenery covers a millennium's worth of history, including Roman Celtic ruins and Swabian fortresses. Rumbling over the Landwasser Viaduct was especially dramatic. From my corduroy seat in the Pullman car, I opened the window as we screeched around a dead man's curve, then crossed the snow-covered, 213-foot-high trestle and plunged into a tunnel bored through the rock. Who says you need to fly to marvel at physics? ADAM H. GRAHAM

the sweet 16

## Full House

**I've never been big into my birthday.** Chalk it up to social anxiety, but it's an annual event I prefer to pass without fanfare. My family, however, demands a huge bash anytime someone turns 16. When my 16th birthday rolled around, despite my protests, my parents rented a five-bedroom beach house dubbed Breakers Pointe, in Galveston, a breezy Gulf coast town about four hours from our home in Dallas. Galveston blends Texas warmth (literally and figuratively) with a laid-back atmosphere (as long as you avoid the tourist traps). We found the place loaded with bunk beds, board games, and appropriately tacky vacation-home paraphernalia, including anchor decorations and palm tree lamps. Throughout the week, relatives from across generations streamed in and out, some spending just a night, others staying the whole time. My dad's older brother drove in from Houston; my cousin Raghav flew in from San Francisco. At one point there were more than 25 people. We filled our days with strolls on San Luis Beach and themed dinners (Bollywood! Tacos!) followed by dance parties. I enjoyed my first full glass of wine. I've spent every birthday since chasing the memories of that trip, and I have yet to be more charmed by a beach town. PRIYA KRISHNA

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the 50th birthday bash

## Best Kept Secrets

**The main thing is** you have to be very sneaky in order to organize the mass movement of 22 middle-aged parents from New York and London to Mexico City without blowing the secret for your fêted friend. Her astoundment at the sight of her personal flash mob waiting at JFK's Terminal 4 Gate 11 was alone worth the hours of surreptitious emailing and group texting in the weeks leading up to this moment. You also have to plan your days like an ambassador's attaché so as not to lose time consensus-building over dinner preferences or taste in art, moving as one from a private tour of quetzal-feather headdresses at the National Anthropology Museum to Entremar for tangy red-and-green whole snappers; a conga line through Kahlo and Rivera's jauntily painted La Casa Azul to a stall crawl around Jamaica market for elote and chicharrones. This trip holds space for the memorably unscripted, like the mercifully uneventful earthquake that had us all deliriously picturing our kids learning how their parents had met their demise together. Or when, at the Salón San Luis—a classic, velvet-curtained salsa club—a valiant, pomaded young man led us one by one to the dance floor, where we never lost sight of having crossed the midpoint of our lives, and yet felt so very good in our shoes. **ALEX POSTMAN**



PHOTOGRAPH: HEATHER E. BINNS/GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION BY WILLIAM MILLER



### Milestone Birthday Trips

→ **21st: Memphis**

Beale Street thrums nightly with live Delta blues, but Paula & Raifords Disco is the best spot to let your hair down. The morning-after plan: a date with the King at Graceland.

→ **30th: Patagonia**

Tear yourself away from work by schlepping to the ends of the earth. G Adventures' and National Geographic's 14-day Patagonia Hiking Adventure traverses nearly 50 miles on foot, including Torres del Paine National Park's W Circuit in Chile. From \$5,799 per person; [gadventures.com](http://gadventures.com)

→ **40th: Naples**

At this age, pedigree matters—and Atlas Obscura and Culinary Backstreets have designed the ultimate insider food trip. The six-day Culinary Naples tour covers everything from street food to countryside feasts of mussels, wine, and mozzarella. From \$2,825 per person; [atlasobscura.com/trips](http://atlasobscura.com/trips)

→ **50th: The Galápagos**

Classic Journeys' land-based multisport itinerary brings you closer to the wildlife than most liveaboards. After kayaking alongside sea lions, trek eight miles to the rim of Sierra Negra, one of the world's most active volcanoes. From \$6,595 per person; [classicjourneys.com](http://classicjourneys.com)

→ **75th: Mississippi River**

Sail into your diamond jubilee with a tour of the Big Muddy. In 2022, Viking Cruises will unveil *Viking Mississippi*, a new vessel with 193 state rooms. The eight-day Heart of the Delta itinerary runs between New Orleans and Memphis, with stops at historic mansions and Civil War battlefields en route. From \$3,999 per person; [vikingrivercruises.com](http://vikingrivercruises.com)

RACHEL CHANG



The night sky above  
Sorrel River Ranch,  
in Moab, Utah



# where the stars shine brightest

Americans are increasingly taking road trips that are about the skies as much as the land. Leslie Pariseau charts a course through the Southwest

Photographs by Julien Capmeil



The

he forecast was not promising. The sweeping New Mexican skies appeared clear, and ribbons of cerulean, violet, and indigo created an ombré horizon as the sun receded behind the West Mesa and the Rio Grande. But the clouds would soon roll in. Outside the main house at Los Poblanos, a historic farm and inn on the edge of Albuquerque, an orange tabby curled up on a bench, an outdoor firepit was lit, a bottle of wine opened. There would be no stargazing this evening. It hadn't occurred to me that my entire quest—to trek across the high desert of the Southwest and into the mountains of Utah—could be thwarted by something as evanescent as the clouds. I flicked around an atmosphere-predicting app on my phone to see what the following evening might bring. Again, it augured obscurity.

Originally my partner, Tony, and I had planned to drive out to Salinas Pueblo Missions National





The Kyöob,  
a cozy, modern  
guest cabin at  
Shash Diné,  
in the Navajo  
Nation, Arizona

Opposite:  
A stretch of  
Route 24  
outside Moab





Monument, a complex of ruins left behind by 17th-century Spanish Franciscan missionaries and Puebloans, to see the sunset and drive back beneath a blanket of stars. But with the outlook hazy, we settled for an outdoor dinner overlooking the farm's freshly shorn lavender fields. Throughout the night, despite my attempts to sneak up on a star or two by flinging open the door of our ranch room at odd hours, not one pinprick of light emerged. Nor did any the next evening, as I sat by the fire at Santa Fe's cozy Inn of Five Graces. While the distant sounds of honking horns told the day's news of a presidential election decided, I alternately peered out at a slurry of freezing rain and held my phone skyward, its screen locating where Sagittarius, Cassiopeia, Orion, and Pisces might be were they not hidden by a thick, wet mist.

**T**here are few activities more democratic and astonishing than looking up into a night sky, even when ensconced in the murky depths of urbanity. Last night, while standing in my New Orleans kitchen stirring a pot of beans, I caught sight of the full moon through the steam of my loft's old factory window—there it was, humongous and golden, hanging over the Mississippi River—and my breath caught in my throat. Of course, though, it's the moments in the middle of nowhere, with an unmitigated view of the Milky Way as it trickles both familiarly and positively strangely across the pitch-black canvas of the universe beyond, when we find ourselves most vulnerable to childlike states of pure incomprehension.

Utter wonder. This is the feeling I was looking for—one I think many of us are looking for these days—when I planned a road trip based entirely on seeing the darkest skies I could find, an increasingly rare phenomenon in an age shackled to the glow of



*Opposite, clockwise from top left:* Baya Meehan, cofounder of Shash Diné; petroglyphs in Arches National Park; a kitted-out Airstream at Yonder Escalante; a traditional Navajo hogan, used for glamping at Shash Diné; the Flute Shop, a trading post and motel in Torrey, Utah

*This page, from top:* The Kyōōb blends into the landscape at Shash Diné; chopped, stacked, and ready for winter at Sorrel River Ranch

artificial light. I started by mapping a route with the help of the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA), an organization that bills itself as the authority on light pollution and has certified and protected nearly 38,610 square miles around the globe as dark-sky places. In the United States, the densest concentration of IDA-certified locations is found across the states that meet at the Four Corners—New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. Wanting to experience a range of topography, my options were rather narrowed by imminent winter weather (i.e., no camping) as well as COVID-19 closures, so I settled on a trail from New Mexico through the corner of Arizona and an arc through Utah. After my cloud-stricken swoop through Albuquerque (home to a very active astronomy association) and Santa Fe, I found a rare vacancy at Shash Diné, an off-grid bed-and-breakfast in the northeast tip of the Navajo Nation in Arizona.

Astrotourism, though a relatively new concept with a nascent infrastructure, is a growing category of travel that's encouraged by national and state parks programming, as well as by advocacy on the part of local stargazing enthusiasts. But no one in this country has a deeper connection or history with the night skies than Indigenous peoples. Shash Diné was built by Baya and Paul Meehan on land Baya's family has stewarded for at least 20 generations. The name, which translates to "bear people," is an homage to Baya's Navajo clan. Though legally she owns no part of Shash Diné, it is inextricable from her innermost self. "This is me," she said by way of introducing us to her home.

Shortly after we arrived at Shash Diné, the wind picked up and the temperature plummeted. But our modern steel cube (dubbed the Kyöob) overlooking the vast grazing lands northeast of the Grand Canyon was deeply warm, heated by a wood-burning stove and outfitted with a pile of thick blankets. Three platforms with beautifully decorated tents and two restored pioneer-era covered wagons are also available for stays in the warmer months.

Before sundown, Baya invited us into a massive hogan, a mud-covered structure with a skylight in the center, where we sat on opposite sides, drinking from an enamel pot full of Navajo tea made of roasted greenthread. A fire puffed from a stove, and the walls, a woven mass of pale, gnarled juniper branches, silenced the approaching storm's bluster. Baya told us that her grandparents were the last generation to live the traditional way, migrating seasonally with



Framed by red  
rocks and the  
Colorado River,  
off-duty horses  
graze at Sorrel  
River Ranch



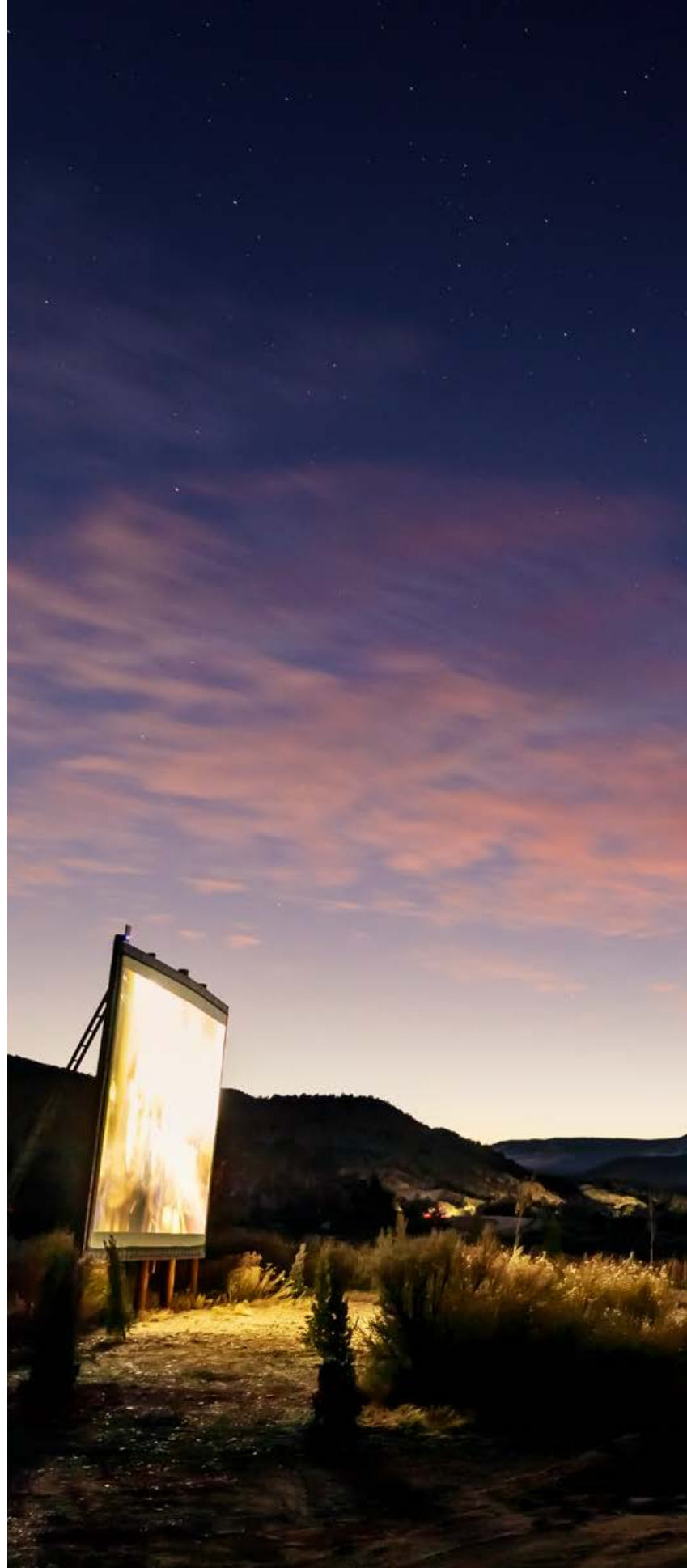
their Churro sheep up the Kaibito Plateau and down to the valley, or in the shorthand of Baya's family, "upstairs" and "downstairs." For a time she left the Navajo Nation to travel and work, staying with friends. When she met Paul, she felt a calling to return home and sought the approval of her family's matriarchs to create this place.

By sunset the snow had started to fall sideways, and Tony and I climbed into our fire-lit cabin to watch the storm blow in. But just before it did, miraculously, the sky beyond the cube's wall of windows cleared. We piled on layers, tiptoed out onto the snow-dusted prairie, and sucked in our breath as a planetarium opened up before us. Mars and then Saturn and then Jupiter winked through the clouds along with a hundred thousand stars. The absurdity of "owning" land becomes immediately apparent when you begin to consider the heavens above. And as quickly as the sky opened, it closed once again.

**W**hereas languages die, paintings fade, buildings fall, and entire cities crumble, the visible celestial plane exists almost exactly as it did when the dinosaurs were munching on treetops and one another. Of course, satellites, rovers, and space junk endanger the constellations, seemingly mimicking their glimmer until you stare long enough to realize they are but unfixed nomads. And even with these blemishes, the night skies continue to dazzle; it's no wonder every civilization since the dawn of time has braided its origin within the stars, or that we continue to look to them to tell our fortunes.

The following evening, just over the Utah border from Shash Diné, Eli Secody, a Navajo storyteller, unraveled the wisdom of the *Só Dine'é*, or "star people," as his kin refer to the constellations. "These are winter stories," said Secody from across a fire at Camp Sarika, a new part of the Amangiri hotel complex. "Now that the second snow has fallen, we can tell these stories."

Finally, the stars emerged and the Milky Way blazed over the frostbitten earth. As Secody tells it, Folding Darkness Boy (who is responsible for rejuvenation and healing during sleep) is the first to appear in the blue light after sunset. Next comes First Man Náhookos Bi'ka (the Big Dipper) and First Woman Náhookos Bi'áád (Cassiopeia), who are connected by a fireplace, Náhookos Bikó (the North Star).



The revived drive-in  
theater at the new  
Yonder Escalante site  
in Grand Staircase-  
Escalante National  
Monument, Utah



Finally, Folding Darkness Girl shows up just before dawn to wake sleepers. But the star people are more than shapes loosely drawn around one another. The Navajo relationship with the skies is highly spiritual, and as Secody explains, each constellation contains within it not only lessons of guidance and the power to heal, but also a piece of the universe and the entirety of the universe itself. It would take nights upon nights to trace the interconnected web of the stars and the Navajo. Secody ended by singing another winter story, his voice carried across the canyon by the breeze.

Several hours north at Kodachrome Basin, near the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, surrounded by sienna sandstone spires, park ranger Nathan Martinez unloaded a massive telescope from his truck bed along with a canteen of hot water, envelopes of Swiss Miss, and a can of Reddi-wip. The sun descended, making a creepy chiaroscuro of the topography as the soft-spoken, red-bearded ranger plugged in the coordinates of Saturn and we waited for darkness to come. When it did, he gestured for me to look through the lens. With one eye squeezed shut and the other wide-open, I pressed my face to the eyepiece. What looked like a glow-in-the-dark sticker I might have applied to the ceiling of my childhood bedroom—tipped on its side, rings and all—was an actual planet, 746 million miles away, its icy aura spinning in perpetuity. A few minutes later, a star shot through the Hercules Globule, the Pleiades blinked on, and we all stared into our neighboring galaxy Andromeda, pondering the fact that one day it will collide with the Milky Way, destroying and rearranging absolutely everything.

A pointed stargazing trip necessitates constantly looking forward to nightfall, but the early winter days driving through Utah were majestic. Martinez, who spends his time off work hiking and camping across the state, suggested that on our way to Moab we cut across Route 12 through the Escalante Monument, which comprises more than 1.8 million acres of nationally protected 200-million-year-old staircase formations. Some sections look like psychedelic martian territory: stacks of melting sediment frozen in time, sandstone arches worn to slender bracelets against the vast blue sky. Several tiny, picturesque towns dot the landscape, including Escalante, where Yonder Escalante, a new hotel with cabins, Airstreams, and R.V. hookups, was recently built on the site of an old drive-in movie theater.

Just outside of Moab, Sorrel River Ranch is an excellent jumping-off point for Arches National Park,



where camping is available year-round and stargazers can enter anytime—a rarity, especially in the off-season. That evening, after a sunset horseback ride through muddy gulches and over watercolored bluffs with Sorrel's wrangler Diane Dustin, I stood at the edge of the Rio Grande and looked up. The ranch's little black cat rubbed up against the back of my legs, and the sky seemed bizarrely close, like I could poke at its fabric if I stood on a chair and reached up. The next night, having made my way north of Park City to the Wasatch Mountains, I gazed skyward again, this time stretching out one mittened hand, just to confirm reality. The snow fell nearly imperceptibly, originating from somewhere between me and Andromeda, which was, indeed, still a galaxy away. That night, as the night before, and the night before that, the stars looked exactly the same, a mundane fact when considered from one perspective. But when considered from another, utterly wondrous. ■

Locally made posters on display in downtown Moab

Opposite: A new take on the cabin at Yonder Escalante





**State Park**, which hosts an active astronomy club.

Utah's dramatic terrain allows for daytime adventures (riding, climbing, hiking) and diverse night-sky activities. On the luxe end, **Camp Sarika by Amangiri** provides all of these, while a jog north through **Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument** offers camping and fresh options like **Yonder Escalante**, a new outfit with stylish cabins and Airstreams. Outside Moab, **Sorrel River Ranch** is a perfect gateway to **Arches National Park**. On the road to Salt Lake City, Helper, a revived former mining town, is a newly designated dark-sky community and a good stopover. Northeast of Salt Lake City, **East Canyon State Park**, the latest to be designated by the IDA, is a short drive from **The Lodge at Blue Sky**, deep in the Wasatch Mountains.

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## BEFORE YOU GO

**The International Dark-Sky Association**, which certifies and protects dark skies, is a great place to begin planning. Decide if you want to camp or stay in hotels. If weather permits, camping provides the best access to the stars. Seek out state- and national-park programs, like ranger-led nighttime excursions at **Arches National Park**, and get in touch with local astronomy groups. Often, unless events are occurring or you're staying at a camp-

site, parks close at dusk. As a general rule, the higher and drier the territory, the better the stargazing.

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## WHERE TO STAY

New Mexico has laws in place to protect its dark skies. If weather permits, **Chaco Culture National Historical Park**, an ancient Puebloan site, has camping and guided stargazing, as does the remote **Cosmic Campground** in the Gila National Forest. Airbnb has rentals of Taos's beloved

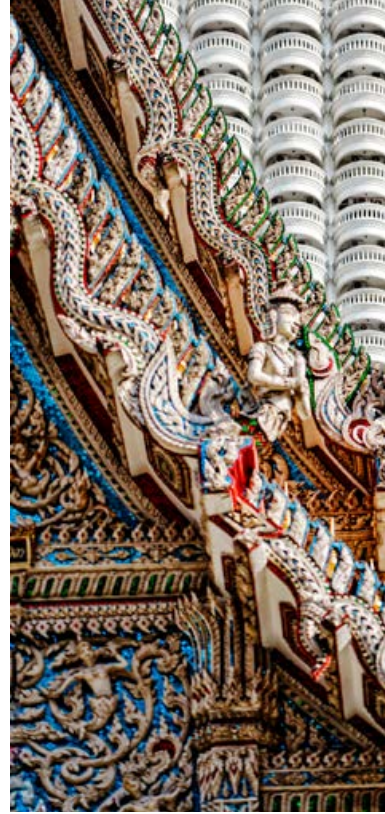
**Earthships**, solar-powered shelters made of natural and upcycled materials, which offer another way to get away from light pollution.

With an abundance of dark-sky parks, Arizona is ideal for a constellation-spotting road trip. Many locations are near Flagstaff and the Grand Canyon (the coveted **Phantom Ranch** cabins are booked by lottery), but you can get off the beaten path at **Tumacácori National Historical Park**, near the Mexican border, or **Kartchner Caverns**

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## NAVIGATE THE NIGHT

Download **Astrospheric**, an app esteemed by astronomers that predicts cloud cover about eight days in advance. The most complex stargazing apps aren't free but are worth purchasing if you want to dive into astral cartography. **Stellarium Plus** and **SkySafari 6 Plus** are two good options with different levels of depth allowing for surface and deep space exploration. **SkyGuide** has the basics and is good for beginners. L.P.



thai expr



Clockwise from top left: A tuk-tuk in Yaowarat, Bangkok's Chinatown; the Pineapple Mister cocktail at Asia Today; an ornate temple in Bang Rak; a woven bag from designer Saran Yen Panya; matchboxes inspired by traditional Thai design; Krok restaurant; the Mustang Blu hotel café; vintage Thai posters; Panya's studio



# ess

A rising class of Bangkok creatives are mining their heritage to put a modern spin on Thailand's culture—and breaking down barriers along the way

By Chris Schalkx

**W**hen thousands of Bangkokians took to the streets last year, their message was clear: Out with the iron fist of the establishment, in with freedom of speech and equal rights for all. Breaking long-standing taboos, students ditched their uniforms for outfits that made a statement. Sex workers stood up for the decriminalization of their profession. LGBTQ+ youth demanded the legalization of same-sex marriage. Even the king, protected by some of the world's strictest *lèse-majesté* laws, was fair game, as protesters called for reforming the monarchy.

But the status quo isn't being challenged just in the political realm. A savvy generation of influencers has emerged, fusing country charm with downtown cool. From trailblazing chefs to progressive curators, tastemakers across the city are rethinking what it means to be Thai. Fueled by folk music and local moonshine, they're embracing the country's historical architecture, deep-rooted culture, and rich bounty of regional cuisines. No longer are the capital's top tables synonymous with chichi French or fancy Japanese. Artists and designers are heading up-country—not to New York or London—to seek inspiration. Here are the names and addresses to know for your next visit.



*the designer*  
**Saran Yen Panya**

Returning home after finishing a master's degree in Stockholm, multidisciplinary designer Saran Yen Panya wanted to break free from Scandinavian minimalism and explore his own voice. His work, ranging from pop-up installations to furniture, fuses the everyday with the elevated: seats made from plastic fruit crates with neoclassical-style legs, tongue-in-cheek fabrics printed with kitschy pinups and traditional floral patterns, and modern twists on *benjarong* (classic Thai ceramics). Panya also collaborates with Thailand's forgotten craft communities, selling products such as contemporary reed tote bags, handwoven and embroidered by artisans in the country's Isaan region, at his space, 56thStudio, in Bangkok's Talat Noi neighborhood. [56thstudio.com](http://56thstudio.com)

**Inside Tip** "I love discovering crafts and textiles at the old-school shops around Yaowarat. For something more modern, Objects of Desire Store in the Siam Discovery mall brings together work from some of the best young homegrown artists."



Above:  
A peek  
inside  
Panya's  
colorful  
studio



Left: One of  
Panya's many  
eye-popping  
furniture  
creations

### *the eco-warrior*

## Moh Suthasiny Sudprasert

Moh Suthasiny Sudprasert has hosted environmental innovation workshops for young people in Nepal and brainstormed sustainability solutions with a Berlin-based think tank, but the pandemic forced the crusading social entrepreneur to focus on issues closer to home. In March 2020 she cofounded Happy Grocers, a farm-to-kitchen grocery truck and delivery service, to help Thailand's agricultural food chain become greener—especially important considering the rampant use of pesticides and plastic packaging. Popping up at greenmarkets and community fairs, the company connects Thai organic farmers directly to consumers, educating both about the benefits of renewably cultivated produce. The guided farm tours are especially attractive for travelers, who can also sign up for cooking courses and plant-based tie-dye workshops. [happygrocers.co](http://happygrocers.co)

**Inside Tip** “The Kitchen at Yenakat is a small Thai-Isaan restaurant whose owner is very involved in supporting local farms and social entrepreneurship. I always leave with food for thought.”



Happy Grocers  
cofounder  
Moh Suthasiny  
Sudprasert is on  
a mission to make  
Thai agriculture  
more sustainable



Hotelier Ananda Chalardcharoen at the Mustang Blu in Yaowarat

*the hotelier*

## Ananda Chalardcharoen

It took hotelier Ananda Chalardcharoen just five months to transform a dilapidated 19th-century Chinatown bank building into the Mustang Blu, and even less time for the boutique hotel to become one of the city's most photographed stays. Drawing on her experience styling and directing shows for Thai fashion labels such as Asava and Mesh Museum, Chalardcharoen opened Mustang Blu as both an alternative expression of her eclectic style and a way of preserving the building's storied past—an admirable approach in a city where heritage buildings are often demolished in favor of shiny new construction. Her team renovated only what was needed, keeping relics such as the original vault door intact and filling the paint-peeled hallways with her signature taxidermy mix. (A horse and a glass-encased ostrich skeleton greet guests in the lobby.) Artfully arranged books sit alongside European antiques—a style that continues throughout the 10 rooms, all of which have marble-tiled bathrooms, freestanding roll-top tubs, and velvet curtains. If Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* had been set in Bangkok, it surely would have been filmed here. [instagram.com/themustangblu](https://www.instagram.com/themustangblu)

**Inside Tip** “I love TEP Bar, just a two-minute walk from my hotel. It's Thai culture with a modern twist. There's traditional Thai live music too, which isn't usually found in other bars.”



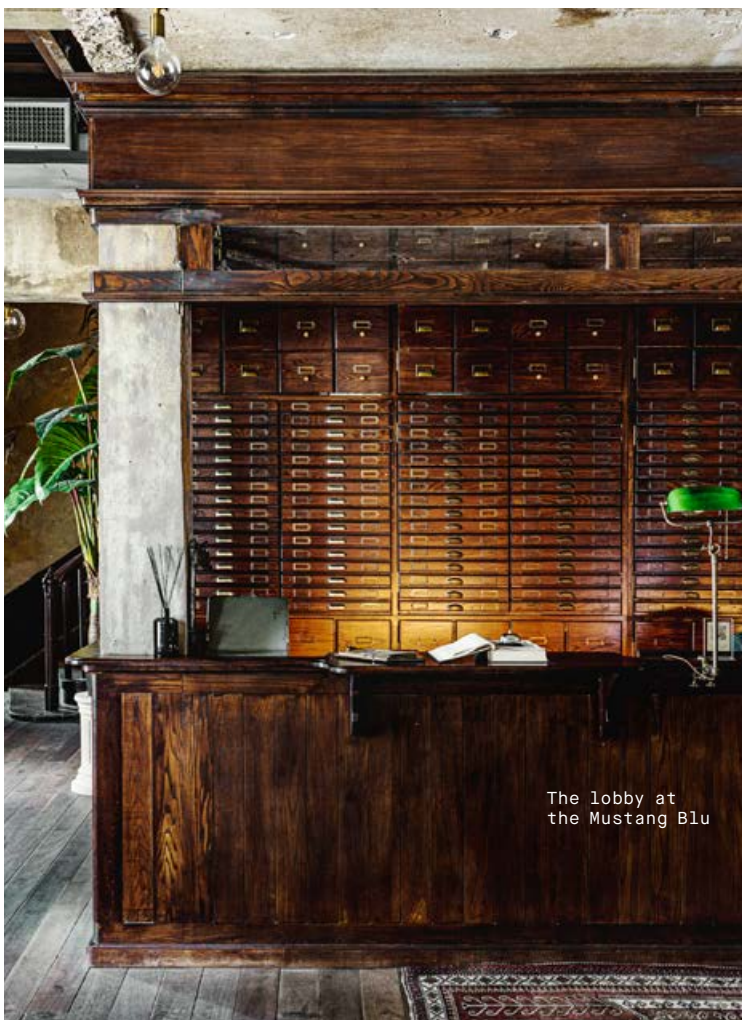
LGBTQ+ advocate Pan Pan Narkprasert, a.k.a. Pangina Heals, is waging a public battle for equality

*the activist*

## Pangina Heals

Thailand's outspoken LGBTQ+ advocate might have the name Pan Pan Narkprasert printed in her passport, but most people know the Thai Taiwanese entertainer by her drag queen moniker, Pangina Heals. Between dazzling appearances as a cohost of Thailand's spin-off of *RuPaul's Drag Race* and sashaying at shows throughout Asia, Narkprasert uses her influence as the country's reigning queen to campaign for queer and transgender rights on TV talk shows and at fundraisers. She famously dolled up her dad and 93-year-old grandmother in drag to normalize gay acceptance within Thai family circles and recently opened her own venue—the glitter-dusted House of Heals in Bangkok's Phaya Thai district, conceived as an inclusive and safe space for guests from all walks of life. [thehealsbkk.com](https://www.thehealsbkk.com)

**Inside Tip** “The Stranger Bar, a very cool, dive-y drag bar in the gay nightlife district of Silom Soi 4, is a fun spot. I always feel super free when walking in there.”



The lobby at the Mustang Blu



Mook Attakanwong perfecting the display at ATT 19 gallery in Charoenkrung

*the curator*

## Mook Attakanwong

When Mook Attakanwong returned to Thailand after working as a fashion designer in New York City, she felt Bangkok's art scene was missing an approachable gallery that showcased more than just the artistic elite. To fill that gap she transformed a century-old Chinese school building in Charoenkrung, Bangkok's creative district, into ATT 19, a multidisciplinary arts hub highlighting upcoming Thai and international talent alongside affordable antiques and vintage fashion. As cofounder and creative director, she coordinates thought-provoking exhibitions and workshops exploring gender roles, identity, and youth culture in Thai society, offering a platform to artists and creators not typically represented in the traditional gallery scene. [instagram.com/att19.bkk](https://www.instagram.com/att19.bkk)

**Inside Tip** "I see Shone Puipia, a Bangkok-based women's wear designer, as the future of fashion. You can see his archive of Thai silk creations at his studio, Soi Sa:m. I also love FV, a café helping local farmers by putting the spotlight on Thai produce."

*the stylist*

## Jirawat Maan Sriluansoi

The contrasts of the capital's cityscape, with its crumbling shop houses next to gleaming skyscrapers, inspired fashion editor turned creative consultant Jirawat Maan Sriluansoi to launch the Only Market, a line of cross-cultural souvenirs capturing the perseverance of Thai-ness in a rapidly globalizing society. Flipping the script on typical design, Sriluansoi remixes the idea of vacation tees and common household items (market bags, handkerchiefs) to create fashion-forward tops, pins, and accessories emblazoned with Thai phrases translated into Russian, Arabic, and Chinese. [instagram.com/theonlymarketbangkok](https://www.instagram.com/theonlymarketbangkok)

**Inside Tip** "I often work with the brand Dry Clean Only, whose pieces have been worn by Beyoncé and Rihanna, and I admire the designs of Realistic Situation, which I think really represent the new Bangkok—modern yet nostalgic."



Jirawat Maan Sriluansoi, founder of the Only Market

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS SCHALKX





*the mixologist*

## Niks Anuman-Rajadhon

A kingpin in the renaissance of Soi Nana, the edgy nightlife enclave on the fringes of the city's Chinatown, Niks Anuman-Rajadhon wants to infuse the bar landscape with a more authentic flavor. At Teens of Thailand, he blends native herbs and spices such as chrysanthemum and tea with top-shelf specialty gins, while at his other space, Asia Today, he uses ingredients brought back from foraging trips around the country (elephant garlic from Lampang, cocoa from Chanthaburi). He's also the driving force behind Boom's Reserve, a collection of wild honey sourced from the mountains of northern Thailand, which plays a starring role in many of his concoctions. [facebook.com/teensofthailand](https://facebook.com/teensofthailand)

**Inside Tip** "After work I usually stop by Tropic City, a tiki cocktail hangout for off-duty chefs and bartenders. Junker and Bar and Q&A Bar are my other go-tos. The drinks are great and the vibe is easygoing."

*Clockwise from top left:* Nightlife guru Niks Anuman-Rajadhon; Asia Today's Eastern Honey cocktail, served in a beeswax mug; Asia Today aglow



*the music collector*

## Mark Salmon

Once more likely to be heard in Bangkok's taxis and *tuk-tuks* than in its coolest bars, the hypnotic riffs of Thai folk and country music, known as *mor lam* and *luk thung*, are now fixtures at indie festivals and DJ sets at some of the city's most progressive venues. In-the-know crate diggers hit up Thai British music collector Mark Salmon, one of the country's preeminent experts on Thai musical history, for dead-stock vinyl and ultra-rare cassette tapes. After taking over the inventory of a now-defunct record shop, he launched the online store Golden Axe Records to share his finds with enthusiasts from Germany to Japan. [goldenaxerecords.com](http://goldenaxerecords.com)

**Inside Tip** "Acts such as Paradise Bangkok Molam International Band and Rasamee have been at the forefront of the evolving sound scene. And Studio Lam, in the Sukhumvit district, hosts live performances by up-and-coming bands."



Collectors from around the world turn to Golden Axe Records for rare Thai vinyl



Vinyl enthusiast Mark Salmon knows his *mor lam* from his *luk thung*



*the chef*  
**Napol Jantraget**

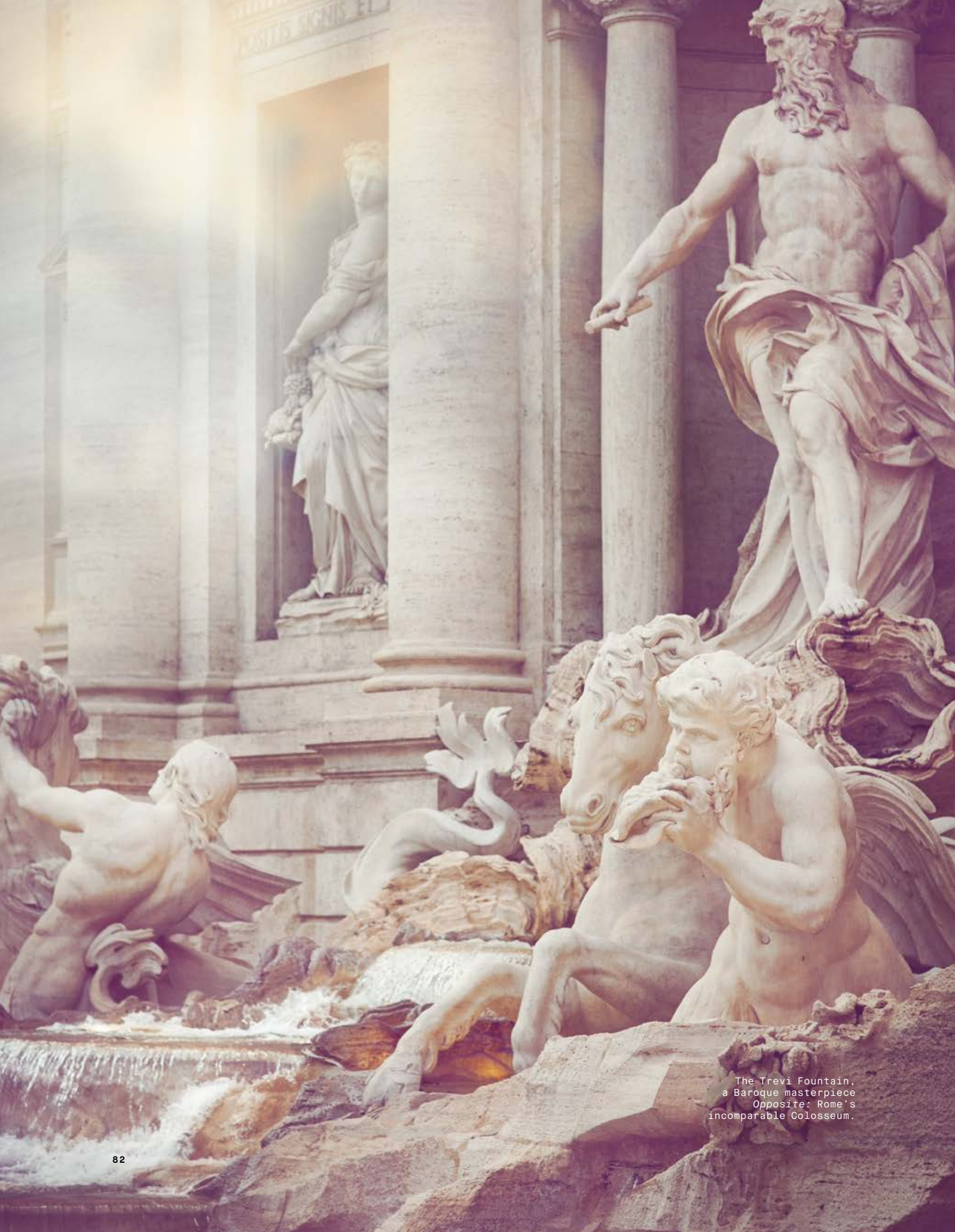
When Thai food trailblazer Napol Jantraget isn't fermenting, smoking, or pickling local produce at his fine-dining spot, 80/20, in the riverside neighborhood of Bang Rak, you may find him scouring the countryside for little-known flavors and small-scale farmers. Jantraget's locavore approach has earned him a devoted following and his restaurant a Michelin star, making him all the more determined to continue his path deep into the nitty-gritty of Thai cooking. A food lab/chef's table is in the works, and he recently opened Krok, a humble shop-house joint that is gaining a citywide reputation for its excellent nam phrik, a punchy chile sauce. [8020bkk.com](http://8020bkk.com)

**Inside Tip** "My friend Chalee Kader takes nose-to-tail dining to new heights at his Isaan-inspired restaurant, 100 Mahaseth. Or try scoring a table at Sorn; it's hard to get a booking, but the southern Thai dishes are phenomenal." **❏**

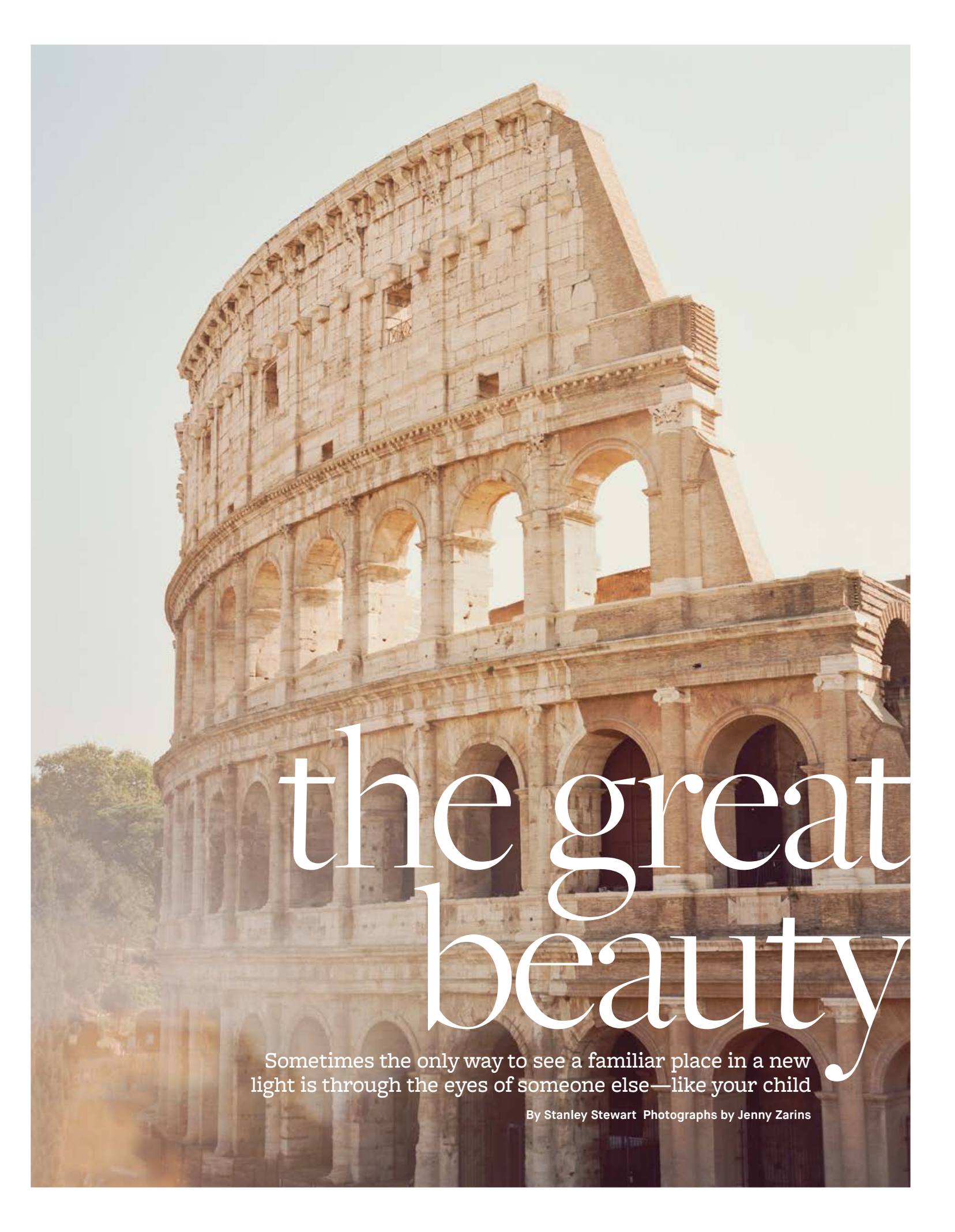


*Clockwise from left: Chef Napol Jantraget working in the kitchen at Krok; spicy nam phrik at Krok; a mural in the dining room of 80/20 in Bang Rak*





The Trevi Fountain,  
a Baroque masterpiece  
Opposite: Rome's  
incomparable Colosseum.



# the great beauty

Sometimes the only way to see a familiar place in a new light is through the eyes of someone else—like your child

By Stanley Stewart Photographs by Jenny Zarins

# there is a fairground carousel

in the parklands of Villa Borghese. In the evenings, as we made our way home after a day out, we liked to stop for a ride. Sometimes it was late, the merry-go-round empty, the horses still. But the old attendant knew us. He cranked up the motor, and as the lights flickered, I lifted Sophia onto her favorite mount, a gaudy creature with a golden mane. Standing in the stirrups, she galloped through the twilight while I sat beneath the trees, listening to the sound of the fountains. I was thinking about Rome and the way it unlocked every kind of feeling, and that private notion that it belonged to us.

There are many ways to discover a foreign city, to make it a part of your life. Sometimes it's a first trip, its impression deep and lasting. Sometimes it's a love affair, in rooms overlooking rooftops, or heartbreak, in cafés surrounded by indifferent waiters. Sometimes, as with me, it is a child.

My daughter was born in Rome. Although there have been interludes in England, it is her home, and so it became mine. From her earliest months she was my companion in exploring the capital. We traveled by bicycle. She sat behind me, enthroned on her toddler seat, chuckling and chattering, prodding the small of my back from time to time when she felt I was obstructing her view of the Colosseum or St. Peter's Basilica.

I stopped to point out things in this miraculous place—the lions in the fountains of Piazza del Popolo spouting delicate fans of water like panes of glass; the enormous arches of the Caracalla baths like a house of giants; a man on stilts with a silver top hat crossing Piazza Navona; the cavalcade of angels on Ponte Sant'Angelo. For me, our journeys were about paintings by Caravaggio or fountains by Bernini or churches far too old to be by anyone. For Sophia, they were about trees and birds and carousels and ice cream and the full moon appearing suddenly between the pines of Villa Borghese. I was merely discovering a city; she was discovering the world.

Rome is grand on the grandest scale, with the swagger of an imperial capital and the papal seat, and sometimes just of its own bloated sense of self. But it is rarely pretty and never merely picturesque. It is scarred and ravaged and round-shouldered with age. Its walls are mottled, patched, distressed. Centuries of paint, layer upon layer, peel away, a palimpsest of fine intentions measured in the warm earth tones of the south—terra-cotta, russet, rose madder, ocher; colors that were the latest thing in Caesar's day. Everyone, from the Etruscans in the first millennium B.C. to a modernist architect last year, has taken a shot at improving Rome, and the result is a fine old mess.

But what an exquisite mess. It is darkly and ravishingly beautiful—*la grande bellezza*, disheveled, unbuttoned, wild-eyed. It is theatrical





*Clockwise from left:*  
Magic hour at Villa  
Borghese; St. Peter's  
Basilica rises over  
the Tiber River  
and Ponte Vittorio  
Emanuele II; Piazza  
Mattei's Turtle  
Fountain, which dates  
from the Italian  
Renaissance

Ruins of the Theater of Marcellus, built under Julius Caesar and completed under Augustus in 13 B.C.







and generous, secretive and absurdly vain, elegant, coarse, stylish, boorish, vibrant, hopelessly lazy, and always endless fun. Rome is unabashedly corrupt and corrupting. It aspires to *sprezzatura*, the manner of being effortlessly cool, of bringing style and élan to life's moments without ever seeming to try. It rarely pulls it off. It bubbles with passion, tripping over itself in a headlong rush.

While most cities are optimistic enterprises—Paris and London are confident that the future can be greater than the past—in Rome, there is a romantic melancholy, a vulnerability beneath the shiny veneer of *la bella figura*. The old extravagance, the glamour of the city that once ruled the world, is still part of Rome's DNA, but the reality is that this glorious past will always dwarf the present. Here, the living can never fill the shoes of the dead. Rome is forever the spoiled child, unable to live up to the expectations of its forebears, its fame due not to merit but to inheritance. Yet somehow this only adds to its appeal. Vulnerability is so seductive.

I love the melodrama, the barely believable headlines about scandals that out-scandal any other. I love the boisterous streets and the labyrinthine *centro*, where a wrong turn takes you to some intimate piazza you've never seen before. I love the chatter, the charm, and the bonhomie of Roman cafés and restaurants. I love the way Italian designers incorporate inspired modern elements in architecture whose roots lie in the centuries before Christ. I love the fat sensual vowels, and the aroma of cooking that trails after you everywhere, and the laundry lines blossoming on balconies. I love the way you suddenly glimpse the mountains beyond, the dark outline of the Apennines, snowcapped in winter, standing on the horizon, this reminder of a wild nearby landscape seen from ancient urban streets.

Everyone has their own Rome, some sentimental map, a personal geography of streets with meanings, piazzas of fateful encounters, cafés where the world tilted slightly on its axis. In a place known by millions for well over 2,000 years, Sophia and I were innocently claiming our own, a network of amusements and delights.

In Piazza di Spagna, at the bottom of the Spanish Steps, we encountered a military band playing jaunty tunes. Two-year-old Sophia danced on the old cobblestones beneath the room where Keats had died dreaming of sun and love. In the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, in a nave flooded with golden air, I lit candles for my parents and Sophia laughed and blew them out, imagining it was a birthday. In the Pantheon, in midwinter, Sophia thrust her hands into the single column of falling snow, a white ghost in the middle of the rotunda swirling down from the dome's central oculus.

In the Colosseum, we stalked the underground passageways like gladiators; in the medieval alleys around the Palazzo Cenci we looked for clues about Rome's most famous patricide—of Count Francesco Cenci, later immortalized by numerous authors. In the Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta we peeped through the famous keyhole to see the cupola of St. Peter's Basilica perfectly framed at the end of an avenue of greenery. In the Galleria Doria Pamphilj, we found Velázquez's masterful *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*—a man

who would make Walter Matthau seem cheerful—and Sophia said, “I don’t think he is a happy pope, Papa.” She is not completely Roman; understatement is not a Roman thing.

We felt the city belonged to us, as if it were our own private realm. It is a common feeling, this proprietorial bond. The literature of Roman travel is a kind of exalted orgy of enthusiasms and pleasures, of people who feel it has changed their lives. Chateaubriand, Byron, Wordsworth, Dickens, Twain—they all went “reeling and moaning through the streets,” as Henry James put it, eager for culture, art, romance, for the sweet sensation of the past. “The delights of Rome,” Mary Shelley wrote, “have had such an effect on me that my past life before I saw it appears a blank.” From his room in the Hotel d’Inghilterra, James took up this same idea: “For the first time,” he wrote breathlessly to his brother, “I live.” Goethe was also carried away in Rome with his new discovery—erotic love—claiming he could only understand sculpture through caress. When his lover slept, he composed poetry, counting out the hexameters on her naked back.

Every time I emerged at one of the classic viewpoints—the Pincio in the Villa Borghese, Janiculum Hill, Piazza del Quirinale—I felt my heart swell. I’d survey the domes rising like hot-air balloons, each one telling a story. There is Santa Maria dell’Anima, which was first constructed on the site of a hospice in the 1400s, and Chiesa Nuova, built for Saint Philip Neri, who thought of going to India as a missionary until friends pointed out that there was probably more sin in Rome.

There’s Santa Maria Maggiore, whose columns were built on a pagan temple, whose ceilings are said to contain the first gold brought back from the New World. Beyond them, the most perfect of domes, St. Peter’s, strained at its tethers. It took numerous architects—including Michelangelo—and almost a century of dithering to refine those elegant curves. This is Rome. Pull a thread, push open a door, turn a corner, look through a keyhole, and countless stories spill out like treasure.

Of course, a child is a fast track into the heart of the city. You have the illusion that everyone takes the same delight in your offspring as you do. The neighborhood florist couldn’t let us pass without presenting Sophia with a flower. The baker always tucked biscotti into her waiting hand. At the café the waiter who brought her orange juice knew her by name. I worried she might start to think that the entire town was at her personal disposal, eager to cater to her whims.

Rome was the backdrop for the milestones of her life. She was conceived—probably—in a creaky palace and baptized beneath soaring domes. She went to school in the French Lycée Chateaubriand, whose rambling walled grounds within Villa Borghese, familiar to generations of Roman middle classes, form part of the Napoleonic legacy. She was confirmed in San Luigi dei Francesi, where she read the lesson, her head just visible above the tall pulpit, while I sat in touching distance of those magnificent Caravaggios of Saint Matthew—arguably the greatest of his paintings.

Afterward we walked through the centro. It was a warm spring evening. The lower parts of the buildings along via della Maddalena



Pull a thread, push open  
a door, turn a corner,  
look through a keyhole,  
and countless stories  
spill out like treasure



From left:  
The ornate interior  
of St. Peter's  
Basilica in the  
Vatican; a twirl  
of spaghetti con le  
cozze at Tonnarello  
in Trastevere



Late morning  
on Via della  
Reginella,  
just a minute's  
stroll from  
Piazza Mattei



still held the cut stones and memories of the ancient metropolis. Beyond the flower sellers of Piazza di Spagna, we climbed the Spanish Steps to have supper at Imàgo in the Hassler Roma, the grande dame of Roman hotels, a meal so refined that we still talk about it. The staff fussed over Sophia in her white confirmation gown, bedecked with blooms, while above the rooftops swallows dove through the gathering dusk.

Food was always central to our Rome. In Chioostro del Bramante, we found the perfect spot for afternoon tea at a café that served the best carrot cake and had seats overlooking the most beautiful Renaissance courtyard. We loved the scrubbed tables at the humble Vino Olio, on via dei Banchi Vecchi, and the bustle at Salumeria Roscioli, on the edge of the Ghetto. On the terrace of Il Palazzetto, we had our favorite pizza as we laughed together about the tourists on the Spanish Steps below. On the way home from dance class, we frequented our favorite *gelateria*, sitting outside beneath the plane trees, discussing the world. When she got older we became connoisseurs of the evening aperitivo in bars across town, always in search of the perfect array of delicious snacks charmingly served with drinks.

The seasons turn abruptly here, more clearly delineated than at home in England, where midsummer sometimes imitates November. Winters are cold but short, and spring arrives suddenly, an invasion of innocent blue skies. The vegetable stalls fill with artichokes, fava beans, and strawberries. The Tiber, swollen with snowmelt from the Apennines, foams over the lower embankments, cormorants hunt for small brown eels, and the swallows return. In the squares the locals take to benches in the sun, chatting, cajoling, arguing. The city is back.

This past spring was different. The streets were deserted as Romans survived the lockdown by singing to one another from their balconies. And when we emerged again, it was quieter than it had been for decades, probably for centuries. Italians are conscientious about social distancing and mask wearing. Visitors have appeared, but in fewer numbers. The lack of crowds means that Rome has returned to itself. In normal times it can be a maelstrom—the voices loud, the traffic chaotic, the lines long. But in these precious months, the city is a quieter, more meditative place, the buildings and sights reassuming a life of their own. Without the hordes the monuments are not mere tourist sights. The Colosseum looms through the pines of Parco di Traiano like a galleon, its arches like empty portholes. Castel Sant'Angelo is suddenly a tomb again, gloomy and funereal. On the altar of Ara Pacis Augustae, the emperor's handsome family, so exquisitely carved in stone relief, seems to have gathered on the riverbank just for you.

And all over, you can hear the fountains. It's the sound that Rome makes, the sound of water. Hundreds of fountains run day and night with Apennine water channeled two millennia ago. Too often their sound is drowned out by noise. But now, standing in Piazza Navona, crossing Piazza del Popolo, loitering among the umbrella pines of Villa Borghese, I can hear this sound, the intimate and sibilant whisper of water on stone. It is a rare moment—a moment of reflection, when you may just feel that the city is yours. ■



Actor **STANLEY TUCCI** on

## *Iceland*



Six years ago, I traveled to this little town in Iceland called Egilsstaðir to film a show called *Fortitude*. Part of my attraction to the role was the location. We flew to the town, which is about an hour's flight from Reykjavík, in January, and stayed in this very boxy, very cookie-cutter hotel, and I thought, Oh, my God, what am I gonna do here! But there was this old farm about three quarters of a mile away, across a field, that had been turned into a hotel—Gistihúsið Lake Hotel. The same family has owned it since the late 1800s. There I was, walking across this field and looking at the northern lights, going into this more than one-hundred-year-old farmhouse, and eating an incredible meal of reindeer and fresh langoustines. It was just magnificent. I was also completely awed by the landscape. My castmate Michael Gambon and I shot one day on a glacier, and as we drove toward it, we passed through very rugged terrain with glacial waterfalls and rivers and streams and these jagged rocks. And the snow got deeper and deeper, until the road just cut straight through it, with 12-foot-tall white walls piled on either side. These sorts of experiences are part of why you become an actor. You end up in these places that you would never have visited otherwise. I suppose people would expect me to talk about Italy—and I could, ad nauseam. But I can't stop thinking about this trip. There's something that captivates me about Iceland, and once the pandemic is over I really want to take my two older kids. There's a bleakness to it—but also this incredible, rough beauty." AS TOLD TO MEREDITH CAREY

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TUCCI HOSTS *SEARCHING FOR ITALY*, WHICH PREMIERES ON FEBRUARY 14 ON CNN.